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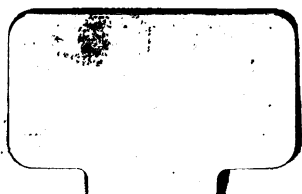
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LORD CASTLETON'S WARD.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. B. R. GREEN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



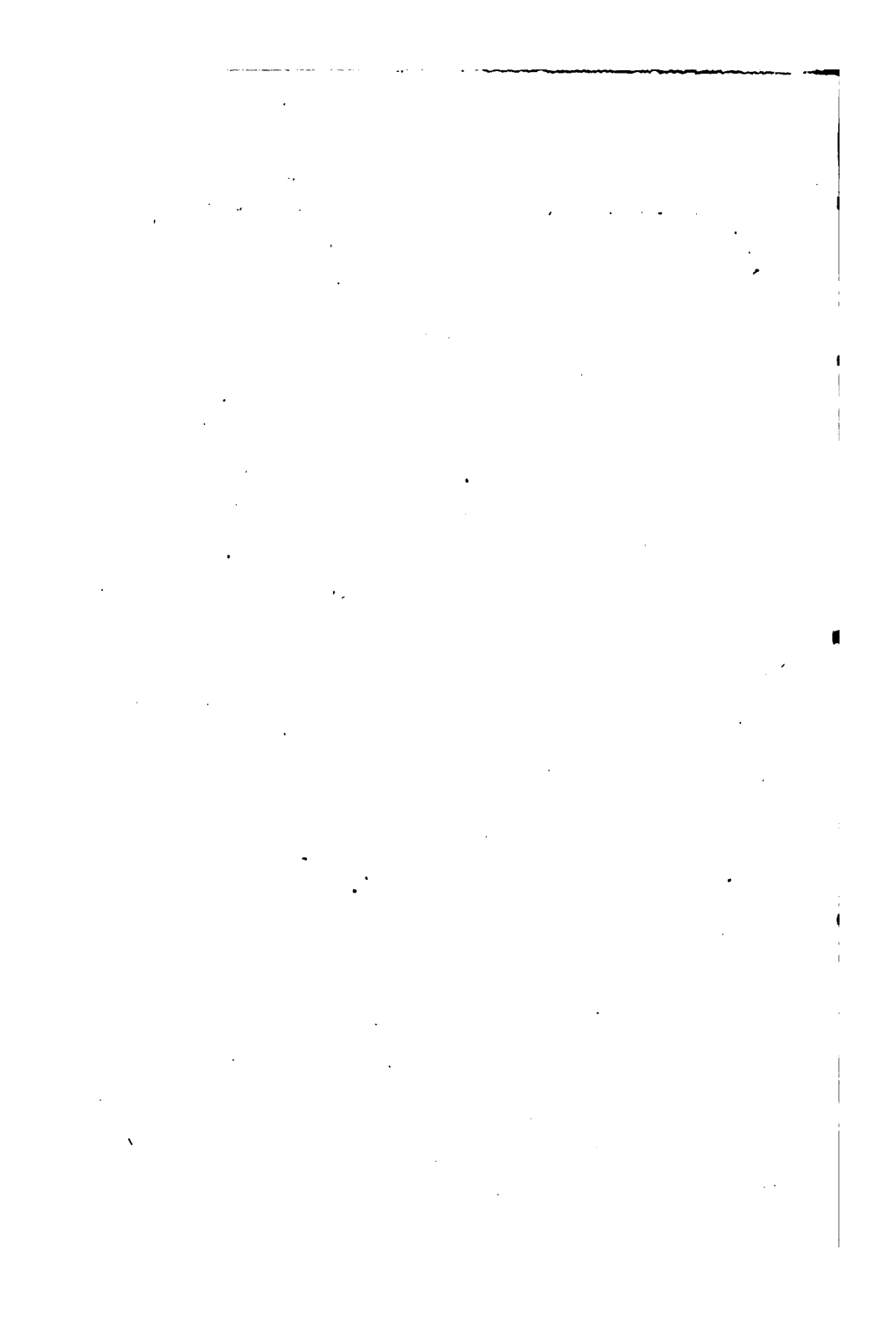
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251. b. 202.



To
WILLIAM PRICE, ESQ.,
IN TOKEN OF HIS HIGH ATTAINMENTS AND
MANY ESTIMABLE QUALITIES,
THESE VOLUMES
ARE INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.



LORD CASTLETON'S WARD.

CHAPTER I.

It stood a lordly thing,
Amid the sylvan pomp of woods.

* * * * *
More compassionate than woman, lordly more than man.

CAMPBELL.

OATLANDS, the favourite seat of the young Earl of Castleton, was situate in the most picturesque part of North Devon. It was a magnificent pile, of the Gothic order, characterized by a sombre, or, rather, venerable air of grandeur.

It might, perhaps, be an odd conceit ; but, as you gazed upon its frowning battlements, its time-worn walls, gray with the mist of ages, you would have known that the pride of an untainted lineage had been handed down to the heirs of that fine old place.

Look at the wave of those stately trees, at the deep shade of yonder avenue of elms, and the noble terrace imaged in the clear blue lake below. Turn to the right. Survey the exten-

sive park, with its herd of deer, the rich woods and pastures stretching far beyond.

Yes, Oatlands, the ancient family seat of the Earls of Castleton, was a right noble pile, and its present owner was worthy of so fair an inheritance.

Lord Stratford had barely attained his twenty-sixth year when, by the demise of a father whom he adored, he became Earl of Castleton. This loss had, in the space of a very few weeks, been followed by that of his mother; and this double bereavement flung a heavy cloud over his existence, precisely at that period of life when men most revel in the blandishments of the world.

Many, at the earl's age, would have sought distraction from the poignancy of grief amidst the haunts of dissipation, and, perhaps (for, earlier in life, Lord Stratford had been no anchorite), he might so have done but for the companionship of one most tenderly-beloved friend, beloved from childhood. At Eton, at the University, in their travels on quitting the University, they were still comrades and devoted friends. Resembling each other in all the finest qualities of heart and intellect, they were yet essentially different in many of the characteristics that distinguish man from man. With a host of virtues, and not one atom of selfishness in his whole composition, the Earl of Castleton had

yet grave faults; and, but for Herbert Malgrove, the friend but now referred to, they had probably deepened into incurable ones. And yet these faults—pride, and a certain severity of judgment—had their source in the highest order of virtue, for it was his homage to virtue that roused his indignation against vice. The standard of excellence his imagination had set up was far, far too exalted a one for poor humanity to reach; at least, it only belonged to a Herbert Malgrove to do so. And with this lofty ideal in his mind, Lord Stratford had gone into the world, and it need not be told that that world had disappointed him. With all the bounding impulses of a kindly, generous, and most chivalrous nature strong within him, he had looked to find in every man a patriot, in every woman a *Una*. From the reality of the picture he turned away, no less pained than surprised—the “*sans peur et sans reproche*” lived only in his own fancy; and so his reserve deepened, his pride gained fresh strength. Then came the cloud, the heavy irreparable loss; both parents, and both so tenderly beloved, were stricken down almost by the same blow, and he stood alone in his ancestral halls,

“Lord of himself, that heritage of woe.”

To violent emotion succeeded a death-like calm.

An indolence of mind and body crept in upon him, a disinclination for anything and everything but to dream away life ; and—with talents of the first order, health and strength to boot—life, Herbert Malgrove decided, should *not* be dreamed away. So, after according to natural grief a long, long siesta, he set to work to rouse him ; and gradually, and, it must be owned, very reluctantly, Stratford yielded in a degree to his friend's earnestness, and shook off something of his lethargy ; but the elastic spirit, the buoyant hopes, the wild imaginings, and the fervent dreams of the youth, never came back again, while in their place a harsher philosophy engrafted itself upon his sentiments, and for a time at least a haughtier reserve characterized his demeanour.

Nothing of all this, however, was discernible as Lord Castleton turned a gaze of almost womanly softness upon the companion who now sat opposite to him in the library at Oatlands on the evening of his introduction to the reader. It was such a look as a son might have cast upon a loving and beloved mother, so full of trust, and reverence, and warm affection.

And what was the spell that bowed that haughty spirit before Herbert Malgrove's gentler nature, subduing it to almost child-like softness ? Was it the potency of a

mighty intellect, the heart of poetry, the marvellous eloquence of the pale student? No. All-gifted as he was, these alone had been powerless to win Lord Castleton to such entireness of devotion. Could it be the spell flung around him by a more than ordinary amount of human beauty, of that elevated and dreamy character, too, which is said to constitute its highest charm? Scarcely, we ween. Men are not usually attracted by personal grace, unless it be enshrined in a female form. It could not be rank and vast possessions. Castleton was the very last whom these could propitiate; besides, Malgrove was untitled and poor, comparatively poor. It was not superior years, for he was his friend's junior by a twelvemonth. No, it was none of these qualities that won for Herbert the deep, true, trusting love of the Earl of Castleton. It was simply the spell of most exceeding goodness. Stern, nay rigid, as was the standard of excellence his lordship had erected for his homage, Malgrove came up to that standard, and to him, and him alone, he yielded up his resolute will, and toned down the Draco-like severity of his judgments.

And did Herbert Malgrove really reach this lofty ideal? did he, in very truth, make so near an approach to perfection as his friend credited him with? Well, to aver that any living thing

compounded of our common clay were without a fault were, perhaps, hazarding too much, and eagerly would he himself, the very embodiment of humility, have repudiated such verdict, yet those who knew him best affirmed that they had never discovered even the shadow of one. The poor, the aged, the good, the guilty, all revered and loved him, clung to him as to their common good, their best earthly stay and comfort. To the loftiest principles our young divine (for he was in the Church) joined the gentlest sentiments of humanity ; where Castleton condemned, Herbert compassionated ; where his friend proved himself the inflexible judge, Herbert was the humane advocate, the kindly apologist. It was not that he had a less refined perception of good and evil than his lordship, but he viewed human nature through a more softened medium, and, like all great grand spirits, was hopeful of its progression. For thirty miles round, great farmers and small, for the most part, owned the Earl of Castleton for their landlord, and they honoured him as such—many both loved and honoured him. And richly did he deserve their love, no less than their fealty, and had commanded it, too, on all hands, would he but have made the smallest visible effort to win it. His charities were on the most profuse scale, but he would not

be his own almoner. Poverty, however, could scarcely be said to exist on his estate; his warm heart and liberal hand swept away that fiend. In vain Malgrove accompanied the benefit conferred with words of kindness from the donor; they knew the gift was my lord's, but the words and the smile were his reverence's. And these went further than the gold. They touched the warm human heart within; and though the first were the weightier argument, the last was twice as potent in its effects.

But at length Herbert succeeded in rousing his friend in some degree from his supineness; he refused in short any longer to stand between him and his tenantry so long as the earl remained at Oatlands. In spite of his pathetic remonstrances, he forced him into seeing, as well as relieving, the necessities of those around him.

"You may draw upon me to any amount, Herbert," would he urge, "but I cannot run the gauntlet through a regiment of village boors. The elements of my nature are at fault, I expect; I hate the thing, nor do I see why I should in propriâ personâ appear in the matter."

"My dear Stratford, that is because you won't see why. Look you;—when your friendship bestowed upon me the noble living of Oatlands, do you think, poor as I was, that I would have

accepted it, if you had sent your steward to arrange the business?"

"Ah! Malgrove, that is a sore point between us; friends, brothers, as we are in affection, why should there not be an equal division of the gifts of fortune? In sharing them you would ease me of half the cares and labour attendant upon their possession, whilst I must still remain so immeasurably your debtor."

Herbert smiled. "A doubtful benefit this last, the relief of labour, Stratford, but as you have a surplus of pride yourself, grant me at least a few grains of honest independence. In accepting one of the richest livings in your gift surely I did enough to satisfy any man with a reasonable conscience."

"Herbert, did it abstract a single guinea from my coffers; besides, the living of Deerhurst is worth two of Oatlands, only I, selfish hound that I was, and am, for that matter, could not endure the idea of a separation from you, for I should never care to reside in the North, and then you *would* maintain that you preferred Oatlands."

"Prefer Oatlands! I would not exchange the Rectory of Oatlands for a bishopric."

"Still, Herbert, this is but yet another sacrifice to me—you have nothing but my worthless self to bind you to the place."

"Nothing to bind me to the place!" he echoed,

as a hectic flush passed over his colourless brow ; and he bent low over the volume that lay on the table before him.

Herbert was the younger son of Sir Charles Malgrove, many years deceased, and as a younger son inherited little beyond the very small patrimony that had constituted his mother's jointure. The living of Oatlands, however, supplied every requirement of the young clergyman, and had even left a handsome surplus if his heart had been made of sterner stuff. His heart ! Ah, it was just that, he had enough of genial, heart-breathing sympathy with his fellows in his single breast to have meted out a fair proportion to a regiment of priests ; but the wealth of Croesus had still left Herbert poor, for while one human creature languished in sorrow or suffering, nor gold nor silver had the ghost of a chance of adding an ounce weight to his own coffers. With all his fine intellect it is to be feared he would have made a sorry Lord Treasurer. "Finance," he was wont to say, with a perplexed, puzzled air—"finance is not, I fear, quite my *métier*." Truly it was not, neither was he in any sense an economist. He would have been to the full as prodigal of gold as his friend, if the fates had made him master of the like superfluity. But pass lightly, courteous reader, over the faintest perception of error in Herbert Malgrove ; we con-

fess to a weakness in his behalf. Oh ! believe it no ideal we have sought to paint ; such realities are rare, but such *have* lived, *do* live.

Herbert's only brother, Sir George Malgrove, had, like his father, been a spendthrift (we say had been, for he too had passed away), but though a spendthrift, he had never been a gambler, nor wholly destitute of virtue, though he wore the garb somewhat loosely. If prodigal were inscribed on one side the medal, gentleman was the impress of the other, and Herbert was not without hope (what warm loving heart ever was ?) that he would one day redeem his credit, and do honour to his name and race ; it is but fair to say he had never disgraced it.

Sir George had always steadily maintained that he would not marry, he would involve none other, " he protested," in his ruin, still less would he seek to prop a falling fortune with a wife's rich dowry, and it was marvellous to note how the comparatively obscure rector of Oatlands grew in the scale of importance amongst the higher circles, on the bare weight of this declaration alone. There was then but one frail life (for Sir George had long been in a declining state of health) between him and an estate and a baronetcy to boot, and it seemed highly probable that both would ere many revolving moons descend to him, for the physicians shook their

wise heads, and ordered the invalid to the South of France.

Mammas with a trio of daughters to dispose of, straightway discovered perfections in the younger brother that had escaped the keenness of their perception before ; but alas for the instability of human aspirations and human resolves ! Sir George, contrary to the opinion of the faculty, exhibited provoking signs of convalescence, suddenly took it into his head to reform his morals, and, to make matters worse so far as his brother's fortunes stood affected, broke his vow of celibacy, marrying a very sweet but portionless girl ; and the tide of popular favour once more veered round from the unfortunate Herbert. But alas ! the inexorable monarch, death, was not to be defrauded of his victim—Sir George died within the twelvemonth ; the papers announced the decease of one baronet and the birth of another on one and the same day,—that same day that saw the father expire ushered into life the infant heir.

This last evil was irremediable. Estate and title both extinguished—for Herbert, innocent of any design to cast additional gloom over the matrimonial mart, remorselessly pronounced his nephew an infant Hercules—the young divine was consigned to utter oblivion, and he deserved his fate, for the indifference he had

shown to feminine loveliness proved how slender was his title to the favours previously lavished upon him.

And why had Herbert, with a heart overflowing with the kindest sympathies, shown himself, not alone insensible to, but unconscious of, the grace and accomplishments by which he was surrounded?

The reader shall know why. From boyhood it had been his custom to spend his vacations with his friend Lord Stratford, at Oatlands, and on the occasion of one of these visits, while yet a mere youth, he had met the Lady Constance Greville, and henceforth,

"To his eye,
There was but one beloved face on earth."

As years rolled on her image lost nothing of its early power, but he housed the secret of his love within his own breast, nor even to Stratford ventured to name the name of Constance, though with a sad presage of peril to his own hopes, he watched that dear friend, not with the eye of jealousy, for there was no sacrifice he would not have made for him, but with a trembling anxiety to have those doubts resolved, and it might be his own hopes for ever crushed, for when he looked upon the noble form and features of Lord Castleton, and remembered that these

were among the least of his perfections, could he question their influence on a female mind? and when years after, the girl merged into the woman, and Constance mingled with the world, he thought she sufficiently marked her early preference of his friend by her rejection of the many suitors that bowed at her shrine. Herbert detected, too, or fancied he detected in her, a blushing consciousness whenever Stratford was present, or was even named; and Stratford,—could he behold with indifference a being so attractive? Judging from the depth of his own passion, Herbert deemed it simply impossible. At times, indeed, he marvelled at his reserve, but then arose the question whether on so delicate a matter discussion were admissible. For himself he doubted if he could lay bare his heart's dearest secret even to him; almost hopeless as he felt that love to be, he knew he could not; and thus was each party deceived, for Castleton, regarding Constance only in the light of a most dear sister, never dreamed of such delicate scruples on the part of his friend.

From what a world of anxiety are the vulgar exempt, by their very ignorance of such refinements.

On Malgrove's return to the Rectory the same evening that introduced him to the reader, he fell in with two of the earl's tenants. After

some casual remarks on the state of the crops, he, at the Rectory gate, bade them "good-night, or rather," he added, "'good-bye,' for I am leaving you a brief while."

"Leaving us, sir!"

"Leaving us!" echoed his companion; "why where be yer honour going to, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"Oh, only a very short distance hence, Harris; twenty miles south of Exeter; I shall soon return."

"I hope so, I do hope so, but I'm main fashed yer going at all just now. I'm a bit bothered with that new land, ye mind, and let alone that, I wanted loan of fifty or so pounds."

"Well, Harris, well, my absence will be no hindrance to your procuring fifty or a hundred."

"How does your reverence make that out? Where and how am I to get it?"

"Where and how, Harris? Do you ask me such a question? Has his lordship shown himself so cold a friend, or so hard a landlord as to create a doubt on the matter? has he ever refused you, or any man within the wide circuit of his lands a loan, unless indeed he made it a gift, which is evermore his custom?"

"Wull, I'm not the one to gainsay that same, sir, but how'll his honour guess I want the money?"

"Why, by your frankly telling him so."

"Tell him so!—what, ask him!—speak to his lordship!—why, I'd rather by half face the queen upon her throne, or the chief justice upon the bench."

"Harris! is this fair? is it speaking like an honest man, or like a man at all? You fear to stand before the best friend you have, the best and most compassionate, I will not add the most liberal, for the wealth of the farmholders on the Castleton estate has passed into a proverb; you shrink from asking a favour at the hands of that man who rarely leaves you one to ask; who portions your daughters, makes thriving traders of your sons, and who, it may be, if God so will it," and Malgrove's hand was laid with gentle impressiveness on the farmer's shoulder, "will pension your widows."

"Wull, all that be true as gospel writ; there be no denying a tittle on't, but his lordship, though he be main good, be a bit proud-like, and keeps hisself to hisself."

This was put in by the second farmer.

"This from you, Robins! from you whose son his lordship saved from a fate worse than death; you should be the last to reflect unkindly on him."

The man looked down somewhat abashed; "I meant no offence, your reverence, I'd fight any

chap going that would say worse of his worship, but except to the bairns—his lordship's allays gentle to the bairns—he has a stand-off way of his own most times.”

“You are wrong, Robins ; least of all would Lord Castleton betray such bearing to one so sore-stricken as you have been—one, too, bowed beneath such a weight of obligation to him.”

Robins's son had robbed his employers to a very heavy amount ; the sum had been replaced by his lordship, the crime was never discovered, and the youth's credit was thus saved.

“But remember,” continued Malgrove, “he, too (for who amongst us, however high or low his degree, is exempt ?), has had his cup of bitterness full to the brim. Was it nothing, with his large loving heart, to lose both, Robins, the kind old earl and his gentle lady ? Lord Castleton sits by a lone hearth, his household gods shivered around him. Is there no excuse, no softening throb within, that would plead, were it needed, in behalf of a man—so young a one, too—thus beaten down on the very threshold of life ?”

“Dash it, your reverence, don't ye say another word ; I could kill myself for uttering what I did. Speak up, Harris, tell Master Malgrove we'll fight for his honour to the death.”

“I'll go, sir, I'll go to his lordship,” said Harris, encouragingly, enforcing his condescend-

ing intent with one hand on Herbert's shoulder.

"Ay, do, Harris, do, and my life upon the issue, you'll get your request, and something beside for a wedding gift for your pretty daughter-in-law elect. You should all of you bear in mind that I am only the steward of Lord Castleton's munificence, the bank-notes that find their way into your homesteads are from *his* coffers, not mine; not but that all this is wrong—vitally wrong. No man should stand between landlord and tenant. See more of his lordship, you will be better friends; confide fully and frankly in him, and before long you will understand each other far better than if Hazlitt—good steward though I hold him to be—or I negotiated matters between you." Trust his lordship, and his fine manly nature will be at once your reward and best guarantee for having done so."

"All right! We'll bide by your counsel, sir, and if things should go any ways crooked while yer' gone, why we'll see 'our lady,' she's allays forrard to do good, she is."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER II.

Reflect that life, like every other blessing,
Derives its value from its use alone ;
Nor for itself, but for a nobler end,
Th' Eternal gave it, and that end is virtue.

DR. JOHNSON.

"WHY, you are not really going hence, Herbert?" exclaimed Castleton, as Malgrove entered the library next morning equipped for travel.

"Really, Stratford."

"Barbare que tu es ! This is the most unkindest cut of all. How do you expect I am to do without you?"

"Why, do without me ! Therein lies the gist of the thing. Think with your own brain, stand on your own feet ; learn to walk, if you fail to run by the time of my return."

"Oh ! Herbert, I can't be bored ; I shall lock the library door on all but Stanton."

Stanton was an old, very old retainer of the family.

"You cannot meditate such folly, Stratford—such childish folly. I shall be away but a fortnight at most ; but even in that fortnight there is much to be done, much good to be done. Seriously, I am anxious that you should show yourself to your tenantry more than you do."

"So you have said, at the very lowest computation, a score of times. Wouldn't it save trouble, think you, if I were mounted on a pedestal in front of the great iron gates, and labelled the 'Right Honourable the Earl of Castleton.' Show myself! Faugh! The very thought is pregnant with disgust."

Malgrove looked hurt. "Nor the thought, nor the act, bred disgust in your noble father, Stratford."

There was a moment's silence. Castleton was moved, as he always was, at any allusion to that beloved being; but Malgrove knew that no spell was so potent to charm away the dark fiend (for mental lethargy is a fiend) as the name and memory of his dead father.

"'No more, Hal, 'an you love me.' I obey;" but the sigh that accompanied the words was one of resignation rather than of conviction.

"Ah! Stratford, I had hoped this session to have seen you——"

"In the House. I know it, Herbert; but whenever you do see me there, I shall disappoint you, inevitably disappoint you. I have none of the elements that go to the composition of a great statesman, and a little one would not content you; it must be 'aut Cæsar, aut nihil.' Better leave me to the popularity of squirearchy."

"Better do nothing of the sort ; besides, I have yet to learn that you have made good your title to 'the popularity of squirearchy.'"

"Ingrat ! Am I not, at all events, graduating with every prospect of future honours ?"

"Are you ? They are, then, in very dim and remote prospective, till your claims are better established. I'd give, as would Jaques say, 'God thanks, and make no boast of them.' Seriously, Castleton" (his lordship was generally "Castleton" when Malgrove was over-earnest with him)—"seriously, you must rouse yourself ; negative good in your case were positive wrong."

Another heavy sigh, half sad, half mirthful, "I am not, then, to 'be content to live in decencies for ever.'"

"You should not, Castleton, you should not ; you have all the mental strength to do greatly, and ought not to fling away the God-gift.

" 'Spirits are not finely touch'd but to fine issues—' "

"Malgrove a flatterer !"

Herbert smiled ; "You have not had very abundant cause to think me so of late ; I have done little else but preach to you."

"Why, that's your vocation, Hal," and Castleton returned his friend's frank gay smile. "However, to please you, I'll get up a grand sensation pending your return, if you *will* per-

sist in this unnatural abandonment of me. Fire, flood, sword !

“ ‘It's not in mortals to command success,
But we'll deserve it.’ ”

With a hearty shake of the hands the young men parted, but in less than a minute the library window was flung open and Malgrove's head thrust in.

“ What's in the wind, Herbert ? ”

“ I merely turned back to say, no need that I can see to draw that thick crimson curtain before your pew, is there ? ”

Castleton burst into a hearty laugh, a natural hilarious laugh. “ What, no immunity e'en in sanctuary, must I not take mine ease in my pew ? —But I may not be at church.”

“ Yes you will.”

“ I'm by no means certain ; I like not over well your *locum tenens*.”

“ But you like your duty ? ”

“ I'm not so sure of that either. By-the-way 'twas Constance taught me that charming little piece of coquetry, the drawn curtain.”

But Herbert was gone at last, and as his horse's hoofs died away in the distance, Lord Castleton, with an air of extreme lassitude, sank back in his chair. He had exhibited a false show of spirits that no cloud might dwell on the mind of that tried friend during his absence, but

with his departure died out, it should seem, the motive for further effort. He sat long in deep reverie, communing with himself. Now, a fine, high-hearted fellow seldom does this without advantage. After a while his lordship started up; the desire to do something, anything to satisfy his friend, prevailed over weariness of spirit and strong distaste to mingle with his species. He ordered his horse, a better circulator of the blood than your luxurious carriage on elastic springs, with eider down cushions. The animal had been of late, like his master, used to the 'dolce far niente,' and having grown somewhat shy as well as vicious, ran away with him more than once. There was good in that, however, his lordship was put upon his mettle, and returned home with a sharpened appetite to luncheon.

In the after part of the day, a servant, reluctantly enough, disturbed his lordship.

"I beg pardon, my lord, Farmer Harris craves permission to wait upon your lordship; he was very urgent, very urgent indeed. I told him your lordship would not be troubled, that you saw no one."

"You told Mr Harris this?"

"My lord, indeed I did, I told him moreover—"

"Enough! enough! Show Mr Harris in."

"In—here, my lord?—in here?"

"In here," and the man with a bewildered air, as if doubtful whether or not his ears had

deceived him, left the library, and Farmer Harris was presently ushered in.

"I ask your pardon, my lord; I hope your lordship will forgive this intrusion."

"I am sorry you should regard your visit in that light, Harris; I am very glad to see you at all events, and shall be yet more so if I can in any way serve you."

"You lordship is main good I am sure to say so; I'm loath to trouble you, for I'm better than three-quarters behindhand wi' the rent already, as your lordship knows."

His lordship did *not* know this, but he prudently kept his ignorance to himself.

"Oh don't speak, don't think of that, Harris; if I can serve you, you wrong me by a moment's doubt of my willingness to do so."

"No, no, my lord, don't you go to think that; no, no, I've no doubts at all in the matter, or you wouldn't see me here. Well, my lord, it's just this, for I like coming straight to the point, our lad has got into trouble up yon, d'ye see, more shame to him, and it'll go nigh to break his foolish mother's heart if I turn my back upon him."

"Ay, and your own, too, Harris, or I'm much mistaken."

"I don't know, my lord, I don't know. However, I thought if I could borrow a hundred, or

if I might be so bold as to say a hundred and fifty, to help him through, it might a'most save her life, poor foolish 'oman. Yes, he's got in a sore straight up in the great Babylon, with its gins and its snares, far worse than steel traps and spring guns. He's been going downhill a deal faster than he's ever like to get up again, I'm thinking."

"Oh, don't despair, Harris; this is his first flight from the parent bird, you must bear in mind."

"True, my lord, it is, and it's good of you to mind me of it; but what right had he to go and play the fine gentleman? A farmer's son should remember he is a farmer's son."

"True again, Harris, and he might not have forgotten it on his own farm, in sight of his native hills; but in a gay town the chances were against such memories."

"Just so, my lord, just so, but to be sure my gentleman must needs go to London, and become a Jemmy Jessamy, aping the follies of his betters—any-ways, better or worse, they're above him—and so he has not alone ruined me, but pretty nigh broke his mother's heart into the bargain, poor body! She had saved a hundred or so agin a rainy day, and it came soon enow, cloud and storm too with a vengeance; she's give it all up, dashed if I knowed it afore yesterday,

every rap of it, my lord," and down went the farmer's clenched hand like a sledge hammer, on the library table.

"And what more natural?" returned the earl, with moistened eyes; "he is all to her, Harris, save yourself. What should we do without these gentle comforters when, young in years as in judgment, we kick over the traces and drive on *pêle mêle* to ruin?"

As he finished these words, the Earl of Castleton signed the slip of paper before him.

"Take this cheque, Harris, and look to the youth without delay,—oh! never mind examining it, you can do that at home, and any surplus that may remain give to the good-wife."

"But, your lordship, just let me give you a bit of black and white for it," and Harris was proceeding deliberately to disengage his glasses from their huge shagreen case.

"Hark ye, Harris, we are old friends;—I could scarcely have been in my teens when my pony trampled down the young corn in your meadows, but I don't remember that you asked me for my promissory note to repair the damage. All I ask in return for this trifle"—(the trifle was a cheque for £300)—"is your simple word that you will come to me in any emergency, and bid your neighbours do the like. We'll shake hands upon this bond at least, old friend."

"And I called your lordship hard and proud ! God forgive me !" and the farmer fairly broke down.

"Well, I don't know that you were very wide of the mark, Harris ; an egotist, though an unconscious one, is both hard and proud. But you must be lenient to *my* faults, in consideration of the one inestimable blessing I have bestowed upon you all in Herbert Malgrove."

"Why then, indeed, that's true, my lord ;—if you were the most guilt-stained man alive, that single act would wipe out all. There's not a labourer on your lordship's lands—and ye may reckon them a good twenty miles round any day, ay, that may ye—that 'ud go to his rest without calling down a blessing on Master Malgrove's head."

"I doubt it not, Harris, I doubt it not ;—Herbert Malgrove is the nearest approach to perfection of any breathing man."

"God bless him, he is, sir, saving your lordship's presence, he is. God for ever bless him, say I," and the farmer looked reverently upwards, "and so, to a man, would say all in Oatlands. And now with hearty thanks I take my leave, my lord."

"Farewell, Harris, and hark ye, I would lose no time in fetching home your truant. I have been in Babylon as you style our goodly city,

and have fallen foul of some of its dangers myself."

"Have ye then, my lord, have ye?" and the farmer's eyes twinkled, ah, and merrily, too. "Oh! never fear, never fear! I'm off to-night by train, thof I hate railways worse nor poison."

"Not hate railways, Harris?"

"'Deed, but I do, my lord, cutting bang through a man's land without a 'by your leave,' or 'with your leave,' and smashing human critters wholesale. What did we want with iron roads I should like to know? we could break limbs fast enough from the top o' mail coaches, I reckon. Then there's reform, that all the world's going just stark mad about—what'll be the upshot of all this fine reform, I should like to ask? Why, destruction, my lord—destruction. Reform, indeed! we want none of their new-fangled notions, it 'ud be hard to prove new ways better than old, I'm thinking. Reform's only a ignus fatus, de-pend upon that, my lord;" and, chuckling over what he probably mistook for wit or wisdom, perhaps both, the antagonist to reform bowed himself from his lordship's presence. But whether witty or only prejudiced, Farmer Harris was a happier man than when he sought his lordship's presence a half hour before.

The Earl of Castleton rung his bell.

"Is Mr. Hazlitt in the way?"

"He is, my lord."

"Request him to step in."

Mr. Hazlitt was his lordship's land-steward, and he was not a flinty-hearted steward either, or he had never lived on the Castleton estate, boy and man, for nearly half a century; still, Master Hazlitt was not a lamb-like man, none of his craft ever were, probably none ever will be, but he did occasionally suffer himself to be beguiled into the commission of a kindly act; he was moreover a just and shrewd man—*very* shrewd.

"Mr. Hazlitt," said his lordship, as that worthy entered, "will you be good enough to make out a full acquittal to Farmer Harris of all rents due to the present time, and let him have it with as little delay as possible."

"I will, my lord. Three-quarters' due last Midsummer-day."

"Better make it up the twelvemonth, Hazlitt."

"I beg pardon, my lord, I don't clearly understand—can't give a receipt three months in advance of a payment."

Master Hazlitt chose to assume that the three-quarters' arrears had been just paid to his lordship.

"I should be glad to be obliged in this instance, Hazlitt."

"Certainly, my lord—certainly ; a dangerous precedent, but as your lordship pleases—sorry you should have been troubled in this business, very sorry;—just met Master Harris, wonder he didn't say he had had a settlement with your lordship."

The man of business paused, but his lordship made no sign. "One twelvemonth then come Michaelmas-day. Your lordship carefully counted the three-quarters, of course."

His lordship was taken a little aback.

"Oh ! all quite right—quite. Harris is a capital man of business."

"A plaguy deal more than can be said of his landlord," muttered the steward.

"Very good man of business, my lord, not a doubt of that, still mistakes *will* occur. What did your lordship make the precise sum ?" and the steward's awe of his master barely sufficed to restrain the arch, half-cunning grin that curled his lip.

There was a pause, Castleton was a wretched dissembler.

"I thought, Hazlitt, these rentals, varying of course with the value of the farm, were mostly fixed sums ?"

"Ex-act-ly so, my lord, but Farmer Harris

has taken in some valuable meadow land this spring, and your lordship has built him some model out-houses ; still he knows the additional rent agreed upon, which maybe your lordship does not."

" Well, no, Hazlitt, I'm not clear that I do."

" Ex-act-ly, then perhaps your lordship will give me leave to run the money over."

" It's scarcely worth while, Hazlitt—make out a full acquittal to Michaelmas, and be so good as to let Harris have it at once ; he is in some trouble, and leaves for London to-night."

" I see," muttered the steward, as with measured steps he left the library. " A receipt for moneys never paid, an acquittal to Michaelmas, the Midsummer quarter only seventeen days due, and three-quarters besides in arrears ! His lordship's a grand genius, no doubt—a very grand genius—but for business—lord, lord ! the babe at the breast were pretty nigh a match for him."

The next day, and the next, found Lord Castleton in the saddle. Each day brought some new interest, something that took him out of himself, and the brooding melancholy which had so long hung over him.

" Something accomplished, something done,
To earn a night's repose."

Yes, there was wisdom in the plan that left him on his own hands, he was thereby forced into action, both of mind and body, and, when at the expiration of a fortnight, Herbert's handsome head was again thrust in at the library window, Castleton's greeting was given in a voice as cheery as his own.

"I came by the mail train last night, still, late as it was, I should have crossed the park, but for the flaming account I heard of you. Drayton never slackened rein till he came to the end of your adventures."

"Yes, like our great poet, I woke up one fine morning to find myself a hero, but, ye gods! at what a cost, the labours of Alcides were pop-guns to my exploits."

"Dear Castleton, I'm too happy to jest."

"Jest!—my dear fellow, it has been no jesting matter to me, I promise you."

"How fortunate I went away, Stratford."

"How fortunate you have come back, you mean. I'm alive, and that's about as much as I can say for myself; eight and forty hours hence, and, like the Kilkenny cats, there would have been nothing left of me. I must be at least a stone lighter of body within the last ten days."

"So you are lighter of spirit, I care not."

"And what is that you are (unconsciously,

for you're a humane man) slaughtering the flies with, Herbert?"

"The 'Oatlands Chronicle.'"

"Ah, indeed!" and a world of playful sarcasm curled Castleton's lip. "Such exquisite balderdash as that 'Oatlands Chronicle' contains, Herbert, I may esteem myself fortunate if I escape a lampoon in some town review, that is, if its erudite pages are ever read out of its native village."

"But let me hear all about it, Stratford."

"Well, you may remember I predicted 'Fire, flood, and sword;' the first two we have had, the last is a bliss to come, unless your welcome presence saves me."

"And you can jest, Stratford, about that fearful mill-stream."

"Not at all, for my immersion in that mill-stream gave me the ague, and the conflagration that ensued, though it cured the shivers, singed off my love-locks."

Malgrove's eyes, as Castleton thus ran on, rested upon him with a look of such deep, true, tender earnestness, that he presently asked, "What is it, dear old fellow?"

"Why this it is, Castleton, that you have made me a happier man than I have been for many a weary day. Do you know that the child whose life you saved at the hazard of your own—ah! shake your head, but you know it to be the

truth—was sweet Jessie Laud's, and her poor heart-broken father has nothing left to comfort him now she is gone, but this orphan boy? It must be a joy for ever to you to have saved him; yet to think how nearly you yourself were lost."

"Ah," smiled his friend, "to think of the Right Honourable the Earl of Castleton perishing ignobly in a mill-stream in Harley swamps. Small risk to such a long-limbed fellow as your humble servant; the peril to the urchin was, I grant, considerable, for he was being carried down the stream with fearful velocity."

"And you jumped in after him at the peril of your life?"

"At the peril or rather total destruction of my new bree—, well, never mind what, Poole must repair that loss. So it was pretty Jessie Laud's orphan boy, was it? Can't we do something for the youngster?"

"Something has been done long ago, before poor Jessie died. You had an annuity settled upon the grandfather, and invested a trifle for the child's benefit."

"Did I? Small merit due to me, I fancy, I never knew it."

"Why, it was your own proposition, and the dying girl blessed you in the name of her boy as her—I had almost said guiltless soul, winged its flight back in peace to her Maker."

"Ah, it had been a nobler deed, Herbert, to have rid the world of the poor lassie's betrayer. I would exterminate such monsters from the earth."

Herbert shook his head, but was silent; it would not do to be always preaching, out of the pulpit as well as in the pulpit.

"And anent the fire, Stratford?"

"Oh, never remind a fellow of his misfortunes; behold the frightful results in my scorched visage; I tell you it singed off my lovelocks, nor has left wholly intact moustache and whisker."

"Yes, these were the losses, but what were the gains? I heard of a paralytic old woman picked out of the flames."

"To be sure you did, and seven small children besides, did you not?"

"No, I only heard of your providing for them."

"What, the seven small children!—oh, that 'Oatlands Chronicle!' it will be the death of me. Imprimis, the old lady was never in the flames, though I found her in a tolerably overheated bath, 180 degrees Fahrenheit. She stood a fair chance of going like Indian widows, 'In flaming curtains to the dead,' for when I burst open her door to ascertain if there were any more living atomies, besides the seven you wot of, in reality but two, she was sleeping as heavily as though

she had imbibed the juice of a whole bed of poppies. By the way Malgrove, smoking should be peremptorily put down; this fire broke out in Farmer Colton's granaries,—a half-extinguished lucifer match, lighted for a pipe, beyond a doubt, led to the catastrophe. The man should be severely punished."

"Not severely, my dear Stratford, reprimanded if you will."

"Herbert, is human life to lie at the mercy of a fellow solely intent on his own vicious indulgences?"

"Smoking is not a vicious indulgence, Stratford, it is a great boon to the poor."

"Then let them enjoy it at appropriate seasons, and in appropriate places, not jeopardize the safety of a whole village for their pastime."

"I quite agree with you here, some stringent measures must be adopted so that the indulgence be restricted, as you say, to proper places and seasons."

"Precisely. And now to your fair sister, Lady Malgrove, and her infant hope."

"Both well, the boy is beautiful as a cherub, high-spirited and intelligent; you will be delighted with him."

"Too young for Eton?"

"Too young for anything but his mother's arms; he is barely five, and thanks to you,

by the time he attains his majority, we shall see him in possession of an unencumbered estate."

"And why wait for his majority? Disencumber the hereditary acres at once, and let his mother breathe freely. Herbert, are we brothers, or are we not?"

"It looks pretty much after the fashion of brotherhood, I think, Stratford, by the freedom with which each alike dips into the family coffers of the Castletons, but of this anon,—what were you doing with that railway map when I came in?"

"Tracing, or trying to trace, the *carte de pays* from Paris to Rome, but I was forced to come to a sudden halt, so many lines are incomplete on the continent."

"You have decided, then, to go abroad?"

"Nay, I am more than indifferent on the point, only I thought I was under orders—oh, trust me, so you are content, I'll gladly carry out the 'far niente' system, under the shadow of my own chestnuts."

"But I am not, nor ever can be, content to let you do anything so unworthy of your name and race, only ;—I really am ashamed to bore you or to appear so capricious, but unless you have set your mind upon going abroad immediately, I confess I should like you to pass another

month here, and one at Deerhurst, before you leave."

"You're a Jesuit, Herbert,—in spite of your calling, you're a Jesuit. What, I have not sufficiently established my reputation in these quarters? well, on one condition I am yours to command."

"And that condition?"

"That you run across to Deerhurst with me, and fire the first shot in the preserves."

"That at least were scarcely my calling; no, I'll stay and keep up your credit here while you sniff the mountain breezes, and rejoice the warm hearts of your tenantry there, then meet you in town early in October. The line from Deerhurst southward will be complete by then."

"Ah, Harris votes railroads, impertinent innovations, and reform an ignis fatuus. Progressive improvement evidently throws him out. The newly-invented threshing-machine, which spares alike the strength of man and beast, he pronounces a cruel injustice to both. The successful working of this machine at a neighbouring farmer's gave him, I am told, the spleen for a week."

"You were told—then you declined to see Harris?"

"No, I have had your Tory farmer here."

Malgrove's eyes sparkled. "He was anxious,

I know, to see you on the matter of a loan ; did he mention it ?”

“ Yes, and we settled it very satisfactorily.”

Again that peculiar expression of earnest love and trust flashed from Malgrove's eyes, and a fervent “ God bless you, Castleton,” was breathed rather than spoken.

“ Why, what a brute I am to torture you, Herbert, as I have so long done by my disgusting pride and egotism ; but there, I am too great a coxcomb to deal in self-blame, here I read my sincere recantation,” and more moved than he cared to show, Lord Castleton abruptly turned into the grounds.

“ You a coxcomb ! you an egotist !” murmured Herbert, “ never had man less claim to such titles, God knows ; pride I will not altogether gainsay, but of how lofty, how generous an order. Noble, manly fellow ! your equal is not on earth !”

And in these precise words, and at that precise moment, did the Earl of Castleton also apostrophize his friend : “ Noble, manly fellow ! your equal is not on earth !”

Ay, Stratford Castleton, you were more to be envied, possessing such a friend as Herbert Malgrove, than in the lordship of all your princely estates, for truly said you, “ The world could not furnish forth his equal !”

CHAPTER III.

He had no breath, no being, but in hers,

* * * * *

But she in these fond feelings had no share,
Her sighs were not for him.

BYRON.

AND "our lady," to whom Farmer Harris was to speak, "if things went cross"—who was she? Well, "our lady," or "the young lady of Beechgrove," by either of which titles she was always lovingly known, was the Lady Constance Greville.

The estates of Beechgrove and Oatlands nearly joined each other; Beechgrove was on a far less extensive scale than the palatial home of the Earls of Castleton, but in the splendour of its appointments it scarcely ranked beneath it, and of this fair domain Constance, the orphan daughter of the Earl and Countess of Hartland, was sole heiress.

Lady Hartland dying while Constance was very young, it was only natural that the child should find a mother in the amiable Countess of Castleton. Oatlands indeed became her second, and certainly most favoured home. After her father's death, when she was sixteen, it became almost her only one; and there it was that Lord

Stratford and his friend met her, fatally, alas ! for the peace of the one. To Stratford she was even as a beloved sister, but no more ; he had seen her grow up from childhood by his mother's side, she was every way associated in his mind with that mother, and not altogether unnaturally Constance grew strongly to resemble the countess ; perhaps this was why Stratford never thought of her but in the light of a sister. Her high-bred elegance, her sweet, but calm and somewhat grave demeanour, were all of the Castleton school, no, not school, nothing so genial and in-artificial could grow out of any school or system.

It was no marvel Stratford's ideal of woman should be so perfect, accustomed as he had been to the truth, purity, and tenderness of two such beings. In his mother and Lady Constance he beheld the type of all that was gracious and noble in woman. That the grave sweetness of manner, the kind of spiritual loveliness that involved the person and character of Constance, stirred no stronger feeling than brotherly affection in the heir of the Castletons, need create no surprise ; perhaps her very faultlessness, together with their early association, preserved him from a more violent attachment. Love, real love, generally springs suddenly into being.

Yet the lady might be forgiven if she mistook the character of Lord Stratford's feelings for her,

and in the innermost recess of her heart (one singularly inexperienced in love's wiles), gave to them another and a warmer name than either friendship or brotherly interest; for there was an insinuating softness in Stratford's mode of addressing her, that might well beguile her into such flattering credence, while the countess herself was not wholly blameless of having lent encouragement to hopes she desired so ardently to see realized.

Warmly attached to her young companion, Lady Castleton could not imagine that her son—worshipping in woman that purity of mind which was the very essence of Constance's being—could regard her with other than the most chivalrous devotion; and, thus beguiled, thus doubly deceived, before she herself became conscious how far she was enthralled, the fair orphan had yielded up, to one heedless of the priceless gift, the first fresh feelings of a heart Herbert Malgrove had died to possess.

It was strange, too, how long the delusion lasted, and solely from the guilelessness of her nature. There was a moral dignity about Lady Constance that kept aloof the mere dangler and fashionist. The transports and the despair, the jealousies and the heart-burnings of lovers, were alike unknown to her, otherwise the but ill-disguised devotion of Herbert, by the very force

of contrast to the calm demeanour of Castleton, had unsealed her eyes ; for, gentle and even affectionate as were every tone and gesture of Stratford's when directed to Constance, the absence of all emotional feeling even when leaving her for an indefinite period, contrasted with the embarrassed, and, at times, even agitated, bearing of Herbert, might have told how passionless was the nature of those sentiments with which she had inspired him.

The scrupulous delicacy of Herbert, dubious as he was of his friend's real feelings towards Constance, restrained, it is true, so far as human control might do, all display of a warmer interest than friendship sanctioned ; but the arrow rankled in the wound none the less. On one occasion, indeed, when Stratford had proposed a continental tour of several months to a college friend, and subsequently discussed the matter with Constance in the most *déagé* manner imaginable, Herbert was half tempted to rally him upon his nonchalance ; but, when it came to the point, he was afraid of betraying himself, afraid lest Stratford should

“Break him on the wheel he meant for him.”

Besides, Herbert was a sorry tactician, and he surmised, from the shrinking sensitiveness of his own feelings, that on such a subject (to him

a sacred one) no man could endure much trifling.

"A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind."

And so affairs remained in much the same perplexed state till the demise, within a month of each other, of the heads of the house of Castleton, and Stratford, stunned by this double calamity, succumbed beneath its weight.

The greatness of his friend's loss, the depth of agony into which it plunged him, absorbed every faculty of Herbert's soul; he was sensible but of one ardent aspiration, that of assuaging, or, at least, sharing his grief with him. Even Constance was for awhile forgotten, or if forgotten, ceased to be the paramount interest with him.

Meanwhile, the "lady of Beechgrove," with a relative who had resided with her since Lady Hartland's death, lived from choice a retired life both in town and country, for the loss of such a friend as the Countess of Castleton not alone deeply affected her, but in a great measure altered the whole tenor of her every-day life. Though almost the last sigh of her lamented friend had been breathed upon her bosom, she might no longer remain at Oatlands. Among the neighbouring gentry Constance had never visited to any extent; it was in the humbler

walks that her true influence was most felt and acknowledged. Among the tenantry of Oatlands and Beechgrove she was loved and honoured with the same warmth that had characterized their feelings towards the gentle and illustrious patroness they had lost; indeed to Constance was transferred the allegiance they had borne to her, and the same fond title, "our lady," was bestowed upon her. And she deserved this confidence, for their interest, their well-being, were among her sweetest cares.

CHAPTER IV.

Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again.

WE have seen with what untiring zeal Malgrove devoted himself to the task of rousing his friend from the deep of melancholy, the positive lethargy into which domestic calamity had plunged him. We will pass over the next two months, the period for which Herbert stipulated as the extent of Castleton's sojourn at home. His motive for protracting his stay was sufficiently transparent even to his friend. And nobly has that friend redeemed his credit with all classes of men, but chiefly among those whom his liberal heart and no less liberal purse have befriended.

Some morbid feelings still hang about the

proud and sensitive noble, much reserve is still to be traced in his social intercourse with mankind ; but it is least discernible where it had been most deprecated.

To his equals in rank, a certain loftiness of bearing may occasionally be observed, but to those beneath him his demeanour, totally devoid of patronage, is distinguished by the utmost gentleness and urbanity.

To moral worth, in the person of the humblest labourer of the glebe, the Earl of Castleton will lift his hat ; to vice, though gemmed and gartered, he will in no wise mete out the scantest courtesy.

His judgments are still marked by severity—stern, uncompromising severity ; but then his own character is unimpeachable. Faults he may have ; harshness of judgment and haughty reserve constitute the chief of these faults. Weaknesses he has none. He holds them in a kind of scorn ; in that very scorn lies his monster-fault. Such as he is, however, with all his imperfections on his head, we present him to the reader on the last evening of his stay in England. Herbert is with him at his house in Park Lane. The hour is late ; yet they still linger, loath to say, “ Good-night.”

“ You think you have no further charge to give me, Stratford ? ”

"I think not. With boundless gratitude, I leave you absolute master till my return."

"And that return?"

"Whensoever my despot sounds the trumpet of recall."

But in spite of this attempt at a cheerful vein the spirits of both were dashed.

"Any way, the opening of Parliament will see me once more on the shores of my native land, with you, dear old fellow, and you alone, to welcome me. I emigrate with the stronger feeling of depression, perhaps, that, besides yourself, I leave none behind to lament me, none by whom I myself shall be lamented."

"My dear Castleton! None whom you lament! Do you say this, and remember Constance?"

"Ah, true, dear Constance! I had indeed forgotten you. My thoughts were with the past, Herbert—the lost, the loved! All thou couldst have of mine, stern death! thou hast—no, not all, for you are left."

For awhile the earl remained buried in thought, his hand on his friend's shoulder; and, though Herbert would have given worlds to have gathered something more definite with regard to his feelings for the so strangely forgotten Constance, he dared not interrupt the current of his thoughts—thoughts sacred to the dead.

"Yes, I stand here the last of my race. Herbert, I will never disgrace it, be you sure of that."

"I *am* sure of that—disgrace and the name of Castleton never before met together on human lips."

"Thanks again, old friend. Ah, that the last descendant of his line lives to thank you, he owes to your unwearied friendship. Well, in plain old English, God bless you!" And their hands met in the cordial grasp of manly sympathy.

Still, Herbert lingered. He was thinking yet of Constance, and in connection with his friend. Why this strange reluctance to question him on the subject?

"You are sure you have no further charge to give me, no letter, no forgotten message to any one at Oatlands?"

No. Clearly Stratford did not apprehend him. He in love! Even Herbert's trembling heart whispered, "It cannot be!"

"I think not. As I said before, I leave you lord over all, emphatically 'all,' a burden I am but too glad to shuffle off my own lazy shoulders to yours. Nay, never look grave; when I return, if I fail to startle you in the senate, I shall back to Oatlands, and supervise the growth of my own carrots and turnips, perhaps grow my

own hops, or go in for shorthorns. I suspect my genius lies in the champêtre line, rather than in statecraft. Meanwhile, keep open house, if it so please you—and I know it will please you—in the North, and at Deerhurst. Let the hearths of the poor blaze like Etna's fires, and feed as many in the servants' hall as of yore did brave old Nevil of Warwick. For Oatlands—you will be sure to throw that open to the gaping multitude?" This was in the form of a query.

"Why, 'twere more civil than closing the gates in their teeth."

"Nay, I'm resigned, perfectly resigned. But touching this more especial favourite of mine, the favourite of those that are gone, Herbert—dear old Oatlands. Throw open my preserves, an' you list—park, gardens, picture-gallery, reception-rooms, what you will, the whole stock-in-trade, but spare my library and dressing-room."

"And wherefore?"

"Why, man, you wouldn't have the mob of cockney tourists read my love-letters, thumb my manuscripts, and use my boot-jack, would you?"

"The first evil"—and, from some inexplicable cause, his companion blushed like a girl—"the first evil may be remedied by locking your desk,

the last needs no remedy. You would scarcely be churl enough to deny the use of an article that promised to a fellow-creature release from pain or inconvenience, though it came but in the shape of a tight boot."

"Grant me patience, Herbert. Do you think I will tamely suffer each gaping looby that gains access to the place to don my dressing-gown and slippers? This were the 'drop too much.' Be reasonable, Sultan Malgrove. No, no; they may shoot my pheasants, eat my mutton, drain my wine-cellars, and rob my orchard; but, if you love me, leave my dressing-room intact."

"Well, well, we'll deal mercifully by your high mightiness. For the rest, I don't fancy fresh game and undressed mutton will tempt the votaries of picnics, any more than the Arabian odours of your lordship's dressing-case."

"Picnics! picnics! you do not in sober seriousness mean that such atrocities are to be perpetrated within the grounds of Oatlands, Herbert?"

"They were perpetrated there every sunshiny day our heavenly Father sent in the summer, till——"

"Till I forbade them, you would say. And you think I did wrong?"

"I do. To my poor fancy, the park-grounds

never wore so charming an aspect as when studded with groups of blithesome forms, and the voices of merry youths and maidens rung out a silvery peal through the forest glades."

"Then e'en let the woods and forests be vocal with the same enchanting melody. I know, I know I am a miserable churl, a vile egotist; not that I remember a prohibition of this especial genre of rural pastime." And, in spite of Castleton's relenting mood, a slightly caustic smile curled his lip at the last words.

"No, directly you did not forbid the thing, but servants, quite naturally, take the tone of their master; besides, they all love you, and dearly, too, Stratford, and would not that you were annoyed; they obeyed you in the spirit rather than to the letter. They know your horror of all intrusion."

"And so left the cur to his bone in the kennel, eh, Herbert? Well, the Alpine heights are not climbed in a day. Time, dear old fellow, give me time, and you may yet see me, like the patriarchs of old, dispensing hospitality beneath the shadow of my own vine-covered porch."

"With joy I hail your prophecy, and have perfect faith in its fulfilment."

Next morning, Castleton embarked for Gibraltar, and Malgrove returned to his home—the Rectory of Oatlands—but he went not

thither as heretofore, alone, though no living thing bore him company. A strange guest for him to take to his bosom journeyed with him; that guest was Hope. Yes, for the first time since he had beheld the Lady Constance he ventured to indulge the faintest perception of a belief that she might in time receive the homage of a heart so entirely devoted to her. Yet he mentally resolved that nothing short of conviction that Castleton's feeling for her was bounded to brotherly regard alone, should tempt him during his absence to sue for her love.

Alas! upon how slender a foundation had he reared this fairy fabric, this phantom of hope! and yet, if that same phantom beguiled him into the briefest span of happiness, why seek the banishment of so sweet a guest? At all events, our young divine did not, he had too long housed the demon despair, not to welcome with a feeling akin to transport the dawn of a brighter day.

Much on which to feed sweet fancies had he gathered from the lady's demeanour on Castleton's departure. There was no trace of uneasiness, not a shade of melancholy discernible; on the contrary, it appeared to him that he had seldom seen her so gay. If Herbert had been deeper versed in love's wiles he had deemed

this outward seeming but dubious evidence of indifference. Even in instances where mutual affection is avowed, it is seldom that a very young woman will suffer any sign to lie open to casual observation ; her joy at the presence, or her grief at the absence of a beloved object is but seldom displayed. Least of all would Constance Greville, with her exquisite refinement, be likely to "wear her heart upon her sleeve for daws to peck at." In this instance, in the face of Castleton's unuttered love, pride and delicacy alike forbade it, and the lady had both, much of the one, a trifle—just a trifle—of the other.

CHAPTER V.

Shrine of the mighty ! can it be,
That this is all remains of thee ?

BYRON.

AT Gibraltar, our wanderer, or as in half-sad, half-jesting mood he styled himself the "Emigrant," made but a brief stay. After cruising about the Mediterranean for a week or two, he fixed upon Greece as his ark of rest. It was precisely the spot of which Malgrove had mentally predicted he would make choice.

To a mind formed in such a mould as Castleton's, the classic shores of that most lovely land offered abundant food for meditation.

It was not quite the spot which his friend would have selected for him, anxious as he was to stimulate rather than calm his mind ; it suited too well that dreaminess of spirit he desired to exorcise. Yet it may be doubted whether Herbert were not mistaken in the view he took of the matter, for, however the stirring life which he so coveted for his friend might, by rousing a laudable ambition, have tended to draw him from the mournful contemplation of the past, and so far been of benefit to him, it is undeniable that a sojourn in such scenes, under such a sun, surrounded by images of a past that defied and will ever defy all competition, must, from the very grandeur of thought inspired, elevate and purify the soul ; nor is it clear that man, while under the immediate dominion of a crushing sorrow, *can* derive any real solace from a distraction of mind wrought out of scenes of gaiety and turmoil. It is more than probable that in Lord Castleton's case the result had been satiety.

A few years back no land had so charmed the senses of the young noble as had done gay, laughing France. In the tone and temper of his mind at this period, he had as certainly turned

from it, if not in disgust, at least in cold indifference.

“ It is our feelings give their tone
To whatsoe'er we gaze upon.”

Few, however, if gifted with energy of mind, and endowed with strength of limb, care to dwell very long in solitudes. And Greece is a solitude, and with its investure of classic interest, which, to the same extent, belongs to no other country on the globe, it is, though the sublimest, the saddest of all solitudes. Apart from the associations attached to it as a wreck of the mightiest of nations, the yet unforgotten death there of the greatest genius of the age, had flung over it an additional shade of melancholy interest.

“ In Missolonghi's fatal swamps,” to use the words of D'Israeli, “the ‘Thunderer’ sunk to rest,” and men's minds had scarcely recovered from the shock of that intelligence.

Ah ! that lonely death-bed, remote from his fatherland, will long be remembered by his countrymen with a feeling akin to remorse.

How strangely prophetic of his own doom appeared the poet's touching description of the last hours of him who had not a great while before gone down to an exile's grave on the barren rock of St. Helena.

"Though save the few fond friends, and imaged face
Of that fair boy his sire shall ne'er embrace,
None stand by his lone bed."

Erase those words "fair boy," inscribe in their place "fair girl," and you realize the picture that it seems scarcely presumptuous to infer the bard had, in a prophetic spirit, painted as the scene of his last slumber.

"Yes, ~~Byron~~, thou art gone,
And he who would assail thee in thy grave,
Oh ! let him pause."

So sings, or sung, Rogers. For us, when we raise our eyes to a particular shelf in the book-case, sacred to his immortal genius, a shelf well-nigh filled with the produce of his glorious mind, we do think, we cannot help thinking, that it is, to say the least, in bad taste to rake from his confined clay the errors of one to whom we owe so deep a debt of gratitude. We think, with a late generous champion of the poet, that "it is not alone in the worst possible taste, but that it is little less than absurd to speak as men do of 'years spent in profligacy.'" The profligacy of that man who, dying at the age of thirty-six, bequeathed such a legacy to his country. It is as Hobhouse once said (we believe in open parliament), "The ass's kick to the lion

dead." 'No; "Everlasting honour be to his mighty shade, for he has peopled the hearts of millions with beauty and wisdom." So spake one among the great of the earth, who knew and loved him, and though but one of the humblest of his admirers, we subscribe, oh! so heartily to the epitaph, or the verdict, whichever or whatever it may be called. At any, and all events, let us, at least, in a charitable spirit, pray that his many great and noble qualities may be permitted to weigh against his errors with the Eternal Judge, before whom we must all one day stand.

To Castleton, with his fine classic taste, all around him was rife with interest; he looked on the crumbling ruins of Athens (the few that had been suffered to go quietly down to decay on their native soil), not with the eye of the antiquary or the connoisseur, but with the deep feeling of the man and the poet. Each mouldering stone was to him a "siste viator!" Thronging memories of the past—the mighty past—were called up, and the spirits of the dead—the dead that never die—evoked.

"I am turning neither poet, enthusiast, nor visionary," wrote he to his friend; "I shall never sin again in that direction, alas! and yet again, alas! but I envy not that man, Herbert, who, standing at sunset on the Pincian hill, or

on Phyle's brow, can maintain as even a pulse as though he gazed from the window of his club at St. James's.

“ ‘ Cold is the heart, fair Greece, that looks on thee,
Nor feels as lovers o'er the dust they lov'd !
Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
Thy walls defac'd, thy mouldering shrines remov'd.’ ”

And both the poet and Lord Castleton were right, alike in their Attic homage and their regrets.

Much has it of late been the fashion to decry all emotional feeling, styling it sentiment, romance. Be it so. Sentiment and romance are very beautiful things in their way, and within certain limitations dignify both man and woman. They are ill replaced by a practice of sneering down all that is lofty in man, nearly all that is soft and womanly in woman. We have heard romance, and the bright promptings of fancy, called twaddle, and sentiment bathos, and heard this from the rosy lips of the gentler sex. Well, all things, like the decaying monuments of ancient Greece, will one day have an end ; so, perhaps, the slang that defiles the lips of the modern fair, may ere long find a substitute in a language better suited to them, the language all men love on the lips of woman—that of purity and grace ; ay, even though it be rendered somewhat fanciful by the intermingling of a few

scattered rose-leaves from the flowers of young romance. And still enchanted, albeit saddened by the scenes around him, Castleton lingered on, while Malgrove inwardly chafed at his loitering. He knew that a word from him expressive of regret that he had made Athens his resting-place, had sufficed to exile him from it at once. But had he a right to speak that word? or, if he had, by the almost divine right of the exceeding love borne him, was it generous, he asked himself, to exert this boundless control over the actions of another? Any way Malgrove did not speak the word, although the very first letter, dated Missolonghi, confirmed the impression that almost any place in the world's wide range had better tended to subdue the melancholy tone of his mind, for it were little less than profanation to suppose his spirits could be much invigorated when all around him breathed of sadness and decay on the one hand, of slavery and despotism on the other.

The correspondence between the friends was kept up pretty briskly. The exile had been absent about three months, when the following letter reached home :—

“ Stratford Castleton, from Dreamland, to Sultan Malgrove, at Oatlands, greeting.

“ Will nothing short of feats of prowess, the

murderous work of the gladiator and the Mohawk, suffice to convince thee, oh ! thou most sceptical and remorseless of tyrants ! that I am not sunk knee-deep in the Slough of Despond, or, at best, giving rein to the imagination, indulging in chimeras for the redemption of this

“ ‘ Land of lost gods, and God-like men !’

Not that, visionary as it may seem, I view the resurrection of Greece as so complete a ‘ *lasciar speranze*’ were but the spirit of chivalry, or, rather, of liberty, once fairly roused in her behalf. Already, from the shores of the Archipelago to the remotest corners of the globe, has gone forth in the deathless words of the poet this same cry of liberty. Even to the far West his trumpet-tongued eloquence has sounded the alarum, and thousands of brave and generous hearts have thrilled at the sound. Byron armed in her cause ; is it too much to say he died in her cause ? No matter, he died, and with that single death has sunk for ever, say you, all hopes of the regeneration of the ‘ *Empress of the seas*.’ Mais n’as tu pas tort, mon ami ? Will she not, Phoenix-like, yet rise from her smouldering but scarce extinct ashes ? ‘ *Crede Byron*.’

“ But ‘ something too much of this.’ I am no Paladin or wandering Quixote to ride forth

in quest of adventures, or become the leader of what you would call a 'forlorn hope;' besides, as you know, the redemption of another lovely land lies very near my heart, and never have her wrongs, her bleeding wrongs, so impressed me as here, amidst these sublime solitudes, and surrounded by these monuments of decay; alas! not alone decay of stone and mortar, but of that far nobler thing the human mind.

"That we shall fail in our efforts with regard to Ireland is highly probable, but I am resolved to enter the lists in her behalf. 'Onward' be our war-cry, 'Nec timide, nec temere' our device. Any way, with the opening of Parliament, you will find me in harness, prepared to do battle for her rights. It is expected that the Irish bill will be one of the first sent up to the House. I understand I shall not, in the words of the *Morning Post*, 'be the only scion of a noble house to flesh my maiden-sword in the Green Isle's cause.'

"You predict success? All hail to the prophecy. And what if we fail? Why, then back to my rookery, to bury my insignificance in obscurity, another 'single-speech Hamilton.' I'll tempt fate no more, for again I tell you, Herbert, statecraft is not my *métier*. Even now I am far from clear that I had not rather don cuirass and helmet, and with lance and pike

go forth to the *mêlée*, 'to conquer or to die!' Nothing like ending with a flourish, be it in the form of a postscript to a letter or a '*hic jacet*' on your tomb.

"And now, touching this dreamy, or, as you, less reverently to my '*amour propre*,' style it, '*indolent state of existence*' to which your fancy reduces me,—well, admitting it no scandal, are you so certain that this same drowsy state will not work out my salvation? Your pardon, Parson Malgrove, I would be understood to indicate my moral and physical salvation, and this on the principle of reaction—reaction in favour of the stirring life you so eloquently advocate. Change was made for man. *Fi donc*, Herbert! you should send me to my beads and paternosters, instead of luring me into the '*gins and snares*,' as Harris calls them, that in our dissipated capital beset the unwary steps of innocent lambs.

"*Ecoutez, mon ami*, you will rejoice to hear that much of late, while lazily stretched at mine ease on the shores of the classic *Ægean*, have I been betrayed into watching the '*homeward*,' rather than the '*outward bound*;' nevertheless, accept this confession only at its true worth, less as evidence that my patriotism is a half-extinct volcano, as that my heart and fancy wander back to the best and truest of friends; so I

beseech you build up no structure of future senatorial greatness on so unstable a foundation. Again, remember how often I have told you that my constitution is antagonistic to the arena of public life. I am more than half a Timon, 'un sublime ennuyeux,' as you once styled me. 'Man delights not me, nor—' no, I won't go on; but I was young in years as in judgment when I dreamed my Utopia. What superb arrogance in one whose imperfections might take the name of 'Legion,' to look to find unstained virtue; yet I did so. I looked for gods, and, lo! they were but men.

"Well, the veil is for ever withdrawn, one splendid exception, and I am disenchanted; I shall never dream again, never! and yet, Herbert, it was a most delicious dream.

"Ah, happy years! once more who would not be a boy!"

"Courtown is here, but makes no stay; and Foxley—a fine, free-hearted fellow this last, of the Frank Vivian type. He has just come into possession of the Holmwood estates, not a dozen miles distant from Beechgrove. Apropos of that bower of roses, how fares the young lady of Beechgrove? Do tell me in your next; I hear nothing of her. I wonder we did not arrange to correspond—such old friends and playmates. The idea did float athwart the indolent surface of

my mind, but I remembered in time that 'the world has nothing like a she-epistle;' its crossings, re-crossings, and doublings are worse than a labyrinth through which to win your way; but commend me none the less to the demoiselle: say that, in all the spirit of a loyal knight, I kiss her fair hands, and hope, ere long, to kneel at her feet with some mouldering trophy of this classic land. Faith! Herbert, few enough have her plunderers left. Too truly have they rived

" 'What Goth, and Turk, and Time had spared.'

The poor Disdar's pathetic 'Telos,' as the last Metope of the divine Parthenon was crushed beneath the clumsy hand of the workman, may be subscribed as her national epitaph.

"Farewell, old friend. Nearest my heart while beats that heart.

"CASTLETON."

And this letter—the sole one in which mention had been made of Constance—how did it affect Herbert as regarded her? Did it open his eyes to the fact of his friend's indifference, or did he, with the self-torturing subtlety peculiar to the lover, strain each word till he convinced himself that "more was meant than met the ear?"

Yet that last line, "Nearest my heart while beats that heart," virtually repudiated all rivals

there, for the time being at least, while the purely complimentary strain in which he commended himself to the lady had scarcely left a doubt of his real feeling in the matter. But who may attempt to account for the vagaries of one steeped to the chin in love's elixir?

Ah, well! another month and the wanderer would be home. He would boldly question him. He had never hesitated on any other point, why then on this?

Perhaps one of the heaviest links in the long chain of ills to which man is heir, is suspense. It may be urged that that certainty, which entombs your every hope in life, is a degree worse, —*peut-être*, but come weal, come woe, Herbert decided to have his doubts resolved.

CHAPTER VI.

The three great curses of the Sister Kingdom are Priestcraft, Absenteeism, and Middlemen.

ROGERS.

At no period of man's existence is he so open to impressions, particularly for good, as in extreme youth. The mind is so free and unclouded by suspicion, the heart so warm and impulsive, that

it is ready to receive as truth what it would at once reject in maturer years as a fallacy.

Contemporary with Castleton and Malgrove at Eton, there had been a youth from the sister isle, one Patrick O'Connor. He was a brave little fellow, had licked more than one in his form, his superiors in size and strength. He was, or appeared to be, of a strangely melancholy turn, for this melancholy did not sit naturally on him—melancholy is not natural to the Irish as a rule.

Often, instead of joining in the sports of his companions, the boy would steal away to the Clewer Fields, or least frequented nooks and corners of the grounds about the college, returning only with the last call-bell.

On one occasion Lord Stratford, then a boy of some fourteen summers, with his friend Malgrove, surprised him in tears—in tears over an open letter. It was too late to beat a retreat, or they had done so. In vain was the handkerchief of the youngster hustled into his pocket, a bold front and a careless, even defiant, smile endeavoured at.

"Oh! never be ashamed of tears, old fellow," said Malgrove in his cordial, cheery tones (the old fellow was twelve, the speaker not thirteen); "why, I cried like a regular baby yesterday over my dead rabbit."

"And I, too, for company," chimed in the young noble.

Malgrove flung his arm, after the manner of school-boys, round the neck of O'Connor, and, after a moment's wistful gaze into his face, the little hero fairly sobbed upon his breast.

"Don't tell us your grief if you don't wish to," said Stratford soothingly, "but do let us try to help you."

"Do tell us your grief," urged Malgrove; "you can't think what an awful relief it is."

"It's about—about my mother," he sobbed.

"Is she ill?"

"Worse, worse!"

"What, dying? dead?"—this last word almost whispered.

"No, but—deserted!"

And then there was a pause—a very painful one, too. Both boys had tears in their eyes; the poor lad's flowed copiously.

"I don't mind telling you, Malgrove—you look so—how foolish I am—I was going to say, so like my mother—I mean as gentle and loving. Well, years and years ago" (the very young always talk of time as a contemporary of some fifty years' standing), "when I was a child, papa left his home and country—an absentee men call him; but wife and children have another and yet sadder name for one who forsakes them,

and we call him deserter; and now I, too—I who so love her am little better myself. You know my secret now; and you won't betray me, will you?"

Oh, the eagerness with which the young Etonians seized each a hand of the woe-stricken boy! the affluence of language employed to convince him of their good faith! the solemnity with which each swore never through life to divulge a syllable of what had been confided to them! the earnestness, too, with which they sought to cheer him—"Brave boy! noble fellow!" the heartiness of the shake of their hands, again and again repeated! No, there is nothing like the warmth and freshness of boyhood—nothing!

"Why did you leave—that is, why are you away at Eton?"

"Why did I, too, turn deserter, you mean, and leave my mother? Well, we are no longer rich, and a friend proposed to send me here; and, oh! *she* did so pray me to consent;" and the small clenched hands strove to drive back the starting tears.

"She will be sure to come to England to be near you," said Stratford, encouragingly.

"She! my mother leave Ireland—the land of her birth—the land where moulder the ashes of the M'Carthys and O'Connors—my little sister's new-made grave, too! No, she will never

abandon old Ireland while there remains the poorest mud-roof to shelter her; nor would I have her—no, not for all the rapture of a mother's kiss!"

Again he was hailed, "Brave boy! noble old fellow!" again was his hand almost dislocated from the wrist.

"Shall I tell you why I never wish to quit our native Ireland?" and the young face suddenly kindled, and he looked years older and wiser too; "it is because she is sinking—sinking—and more than half her misery and degradation lies at the door of her nobles who forsake her, and spend their money over here in the sister kingdom, or, worse, in foreign lands. Papa has done so. They say all is gone, but we should little heed that if he would come back. He loved us once—we would forget all but that."

Castleton never forgot this story; his high, generous nature was powerfully impressed by it. Years after, when the narrator had attained to manhood, the Castleton coffers sent him to the Irish bar, and they remained fast friends and voluminous correspondents; for, from his Irish home, the young barrister poured forth a tide of eloquence, of picturesque poetic eloquence, that kept interest afloat.

Yes, from this boyish intimacy sprung the

sympathy which, through life, the Earl of Castleton manifested for the sister kingdom. Her wrongs he yearned to redress; and this, with his strong anxiety to satisfy his friend Malgrove, was the lever that, prevailing over constitutional indolence and reserve, ultimately sent him to the Upper House, the avowed advocate of her national rights.

In the general summing-up of his self-estimate as regarded his adaptation to a statesman's career, Lord Castleton was undeniably correct, for no man on earth was, both by nature and education, less calculated to become the tool of a party or the member of a clique. Most especially did he eschew all the vulgar arts of popularity; artifice, clap-trap, he literally abhorred; while his spirit was of that high and unbending character that neither the court, the senate, nor the people could sway, if opposed to his sense of justice. Once convinced of the integrity of the object he had in view, he remained resolved and unchangeable. He neither courted the smiles nor deprecated the frowns of the great; perhaps he had less to gain from the former than most men, for he was already powerful by rank, talent, and wealth—the three great political aristocracies. If he had ambition, it was a patriot's ambition—to serve his country without a thought of personal aggrandizement.

He had refused the premiership if its acceptance had fettered his opinions. Honours and preferments, indeed, could scarcely have added to his dignity either as man or noble ; he stood in the first rank in each capacity.

But if, on the one hand, Lord Castleton was to a certain extent disqualified for the senate, there was much to commend him to it on the other, much that directed public attention to him as likely to become one of the most rising men of the day. To perfect integrity of principle were united talents of the first order. True, he was without the weight of years in support of his opinions, but he had a solidity of judgment allowed to be immeasurably beyond them ; nor were his fine scholarship, the brilliancy of his fancy, and his fervid eloquence without their influence, not to mention an ease and majesty of deportment unequalled even in that august assembly, the House of Peers.

* * * * *

A faint murmur of approbation rose above the din of voices, as calm and collected Lord Castleton rose to address the House on the Irish question, but calmly he did not continue to do so, he was no stoic, and too engrossingly had the woes and mismanagement of that unhappy country absorbed his mind of late, for him coldly

or even dispassionately to enlarge upon the one or the other.

Careless of his reputation as an orator, but most anxious in behalf of the cause for which he struggled, he surrendered himself completely to the mastery of his feelings. It was a subject that afforded full scope to his splendid genius. Conscious of the singleness and integrity of his intentions, strong in his belief of the justice of his cause, and hopeful of success, he poured forth such a tide of eloquence, that the sympathies of men, even those inimical to his views, were for the time being, at least, enlisted in behalf of the sister isle.

The picture he drew of her national degradation, and then the transition from the gloom of that picture to the delineation of the joy of emancipating her from that degradation, were strokes of a master-spirit that found an answering echo in nearly every breast.

Lord Castleton had availed himself of no artificial aid from the flowers of rhetoric, no sentimental appeal had been made, no far-fetched metaphors employed, he had gone straight to the point; the grievance, and the means whereby that grievance might be redressed. The voice of humanity, of nature, spoke through him, and nature responded to it. His triumph was complete. And yet, amidst the deafening applause

of the House, the compliments that overwhelmed him on quitting it, and the panegyrics of the newspapers on the following morning, Castleton himself, after the furore had in a measure subsided, was the first to doubt whether anything had been really gained, or was likely to be gained to the cause he had so warmly espoused, and the lapse of eight and forty hours brought conviction in the place of doubt.

Well, neither his lordship, nor his lordship's friends had premised that a mighty revolution would be effected in a single night, and almost by a single voice, neither had Castleton entered the arena of political strife unprepared for the encounter of difficulties, many and great; the cause he had once advocated he was little likely to abandon if human effort might avail, and few could be more stern and unbending than the Earl of Castleton in a righteous cause, and such he deemed the preservation, socially and morally speaking, of millions of men to be.

Meanwhile, Malgrove, in his retreat at Oatlands, read with beating heart and glistening eyes, the earl's speech; once, twice, thrice; he tried to calm himself, no, it was useless to try; he must see Stratford, he must thank him, he must hug him, and so, after a few hasty arrangements, the express next morning steamed him up to town in time for breakfast at St. James's,

though at Oatlands he had called twelve the hour of luncheon.

"My dear, dear Castleton, I could not help running up to congratulate you on your triumph. Ah, if you could guess what a proud happy fellow you have made of me! What earnest feeling! what sublime reasoning! what grand moral deductions! I have the whole speech by heart. Now, will you go in for short hours?"

"Hereafter, yes. The Ides of March are come, but are they passed?" and Castleton laughed.

"Nonsense! Why everybody is talking of your victory."

"Oh no, Herbert, the ferment is over; your condolences were more in character, I assure you. Really sorry to smother you with a wet blanket; but what's to be done?"

"My dear Stratford!" and Herbert took from his pocket, and unfolded, a newspaper.

A comic expression stole over the gravity of the earl's features. "The 'Oatlands Chronicle,' Herbert?"

"No, the 'Times;' listen."

"Pshaw! that's two days old; you don't know what revolutions may be brought about in eight and forty hours.

"The doctrine to-day that is loyalty sound,
'To-morrow may bring us a halter.'

No, my popularity is already on the decline ; read this article, and this, the latest edition ; you will find abuse enough to spoil your appetite, unless you have the philosophy of the stagyrite ; but as that's not a desideratum—I mean loss of appetite after a toilsome journey—try in their stead this broiled pheasant ; its delicate flavour has sufficed to restore one half my good humour already.”

But Malgrove, pulled down from his st'lt's, surprised, and mortified, did slender justice to the choice viands pressed upon his notice.

“Do pray explain, Stratford.”

“My dear Herbert, the thing explains itself ; you will find that the patriot of yesterday may to-day be pronounced a double-dyed traitor, and that too without looking towards the opposition benches. To-day I am a seditious fellow, and by to-morrow's dawn it would scarcely surprise me to find myself at the head of the ‘Peep-o'-day boys.’”

There was considerable exaggeration in all this, but there was also much of truth.

Those on whom his lordship had most confidently relied for support, who had appeared most impressed with the soundness of his views, were precisely those whose defection he had now to deplore.

The fact is, men, Englishmen above all, revolt

by common consent against censure, no matter how delicately administered, and Castleton had dealt out his philippics with an unsparing tongue. Strong in the singleness and integrity of his purpose, and scorning subterfuge, he had, while espousing the cause of the oppressed, to a certain extent denounced his countrymen as their oppressors, for church endowments he persisted in regarding in the light of an oppression, and man, true to his instinctive nobility of nature, had, while under the immediate influence of his powerful outburst, which might have challenged comparison with Sheridan's famous appeal on behalf of "trampled Hindostan," evinced no inconsiderable amount of sympathy with their Irish brethren; but eight and forty hours had, as Castleton averred, sent their sympathies to sleep again! pity, except in the breasts of the few, gave place to partial indignation against the man who, taking his seat for the first time in that awful assembly, had ventured to address them in the character of a censor.

Foremost in the rank of those who now turned the tables upon Castleton, was one whose tergiversation had acquired him the sobriquet of "Sir Proteus." Clever, but specious, with a fund of world-knowledge, his object at the next sitting was not alone to vindicate the right of Englishmen to withhold from Ireland her power to direct

her own legislature, and the free exercise of her religious creed, but to draw attention to those points of Lord Castleton's address which more obviously cast a slur upon the British Government.

Infinitely disturbed by this unexpected turn of affairs in the very outset of Stratford's political career, as tending, he feared, to disenchant, if not disgust him, Herbert endeavoured to soothe him into a more pliant mood. He might as well have sought to uproot St. Paul's with his bare hands.

"Patience, Stratford ; it cannot be but that justice must in the end prevail."

"Justice, Herbert ! the fairest child of gray-haired Time. Why, as Hamlet says, 'All the undelv'd mines cannot furnish forth an ounce of it.' I can more easily forgive these men their lack of sympathy than their hypocrisy."

"My dear Stratford, I'm afraid you must condescend to forgive to poor humanity a trifle more than you incline to ; it's not in your line, I know, but you must conciliate where you now condemn. Humour, not incense these men,—your measures are scarcely ripe for a coup d'état."

"By my faith, Sir Parson, I believe with moderate opportunity for the exercise of your diplomacy, you'd make the prettier rascal of the two. What say you to a post in the state mili-

tant? No, Herbert, I will *not* conciliate where I can only condemn; I will not abate one jot of the independence of those principles I have already publicly avowed, nor pander to a fickle and intriguing ministry, though the first dignity of the State were the reward of my subservience."

"My dear Stratford, I do not ask you to surrender a jot of the honest independence of your character, I would not counsel a departure from the most punctilious honour; but I do ask you to meet these sage senators in a less hostile, or rather a less lofty spirit. If you would win the battle you must 'stoop to conquer.' Believe me, no oratory is so persuasive as the oratory of conciliation. You are not wont lightly or arrogantly to set that man down as dishonourable whose opinion is at issue with your own."

"No, Herbert, but I would ask if it be even common honesty to repudiate those opinions to-day, which yesterday had your warmest support? Such *has* been, such *is* the line of policy adopted by Lord Harefield, and is such a man, I would ask, worthy to be conciliated?"

"Being yourself a politician, though I fear me a sorry one after all, I must leave you to resolve the question; only remember, my dear Castleton, you have publicly enrolled yourself the champion of Ireland, and must not now in hasty indignation abandon her."

"Who says, who dares to say I would abandon her!" he echoed vehemently; "never, while a shred of hope remains to me that I can gain one poor solitary immunity for her; but I have been asked to do that—indirectly, I have been asked to desert the cause to which I stand solemnly pledged, and (here, let me whisper it, Herbert, in very shame of my order) head the ranks of the opposition;—and now what think you?"

"Why, that they have mistaken you, as you did them."

"I think they have. Yes, Herbert, absenteeism is a heavy curse to Ireland; middlemen, which it entails, one heavier still; but the call to support a hostile creed is the heaviest of all, and I will never rest till she is relieved of this last burden," and taking his hat, Castleton left the house with his friend.

CHAPTER VII.

Why comes *she* 'cross his path?

IN all that has just been narrated between the two friends, there was in reality no division of opinion, though the one had manifested strong indignation against the rampant vices of the

day, while all had appeared calm as the bosom of a summer lake in the other.

With feelings as warm, and a generosity no less profound, the mind of Lord Castleton was cast in a sterner mould than his friend's. Again, there was in Malgrove a deep and inextinguishable humility which never permitted him to forget his own fallibility. He knew how he had struggled—was struggling even now—against his own weakness, and he knew, alas! how ineffectual had hitherto been those struggles, and nothing gives so keen an edge to our susceptibilities as this kind of sympathy with human infirmity.

It were tedious to follow Lord Castleton step by step through what might be termed his political warfare during the whole of the session; suffice it, that when Parliament dissolved, he and his party were in a glorious minority. But if he had gained no present advantage to the Irish cause, it is not improbable that he had, in conjunction with his colleagues, paved the way for much that might at no very distant day advance her interests, while he had fully established his credit, not alone as a man of distinguished abilities, but as one on whom the nation might confidently rely in any emergency. Independently of the weight of Lord Castleton's opinion, there was always the conviction of its

LORD CASTLETON'S WARD.

perfect integrity. Whatever might be his individual bias in favour of the point at issue, it never in the remotest degree influenced his judgment.

The dissolution of Parliament was the signal for Castleton's friends to rally round him. A party of gentlemen, chiefly college chums, urged him, after all his hot work, to run over to Paris with them; and it must be owned his lordship, like Mariana in the "Moated Grange," was "a-weary, a-weary," perhaps in more senses than one. Men, Englishmen in particular, can't stand defeat—at least they are not philosophers under it, and so appealing to Herbert for the casting vote, which he sure was in favour of locomotion, Sir Childe set off on another pilgrimage. An extract or two from his correspondence with his friend will introduce another party on the scene. The letter was dated from the Hôtel Henri Quatre :—

"Yesterday we fell in with our old acquaintances, Sir Archibald and Lady Graham. They are proceeding to the Southern provinces, which the former may reach alive, but will hardly, I think, quit but to his last resting-lace. Her ladyship (you remember her, Herbert) is beautiful as ever. The sorrow that now hangs over her has softened what you, I recollect, thought an

excess of cold dignity in her, but which never so struck me, or, if it did, only as contrasting favourably with the lighter tone so prevalent in fashionable circles. Lady Graham is my type of what a woman, a wife, and a mother should be. Not a breath has ever sullied her fair name; even so would I have it in the one whom I love. I could not, Herbert, I could not endure that the faintest perception of levity approached her—even the idle admiration of the world should, if possible, be spared her. I would not she were conscious of a passing glance tending to disturb the purity of a soul I could not live to know others shared with me, though but in thought. The exquisite delicacy of a woman's mind has not inaptly been compared to the impalpable down on the wing of the butterfly; a breath may taint, if not destroy, the one and the other. Shall I ever find my Una?"

Second extract in reply to his friend:—

"Strange, my dear Herbert, that you, of all men, should quarrel with a demeanour in Lady Graham which is so faultless—'so coldly, cruelly faultless,' you term it. Should any married woman be other than coldly faultless? Unhesitatingly I answer no; the faintest approach to lightness revolts me, but you will again say I am refining. 'Where,' you ask, 'is her lady-

ship's daughter ? Forgive me, I had forgotten her, but do not suppose she is forgotten by her mother ; no, on my inquiry (after your reminder) ' whether she would not find the companionship of her child a solace to her ? ' she silenced me with a most touching candour, said I was right ; it would indeed be the sweetest a mother could enjoy, but that it would in her case be a most selfish one ; that she was far too young to be exposed to such a trial as the death-bed of a tenderly-beloved father.

" How charming all this !

" Love is not love if it is not prepared to make all sacrifice for the loved one. Who taught me this lesson ? One, Herbert, in whose breast no grain of alloy is to be found. Are you not mistaken as to the age of her young daughter ? Lady Graham speaks of her as quite a child. I have been unfortunate in not meeting with her, though I went with pockets full of the rarest bon-bons. My own remembrance of Helen Graham refers back to earliest childhood.

" By the way, it is reported that they—Lady Graham and this child—will be left in straightened circumstances. Her ladyship was, it appears, at her marriage, wholly undowered, and Sir Archibald's personal property is insignificant, while the estate descends in strict entail to the nephew, Arthur Graham, and a very fine young

fellow he is too ; but you know him. How I loathe this kind of inquisition into one's neighbour's private affairs ; it is an impertinence which leaves me without an excuse, unless the desire to be of service, if that were possible, be allowed to stand for one. Is there any mode which delicacy may sanction, whereby some of my useless thousands may be covertly transferred to the slenderly-lined coffers of the widow and her child, for life in the good baronet is ebbing fast away ? Think it over, Herbert."

So Lady Graham was my Lord Castleton's ideal, the type of womanhood he had set up to be worshipped in the wife of his bosom. "Oh, human nature, how admirably canst thou fool thyself !" And what a strange anomaly is man, least informed, where most he deems himself infallible.

Strange that the keen intellect and riper judgment of the somewhat blasé man of the world failed to detect in this woman what had been patent to the student and the recluse within a week of their acquaintance, for the two had met Sir Archibald and his lady abroad some years back. Herbert, however, had been much less intimate with them than his friend, from the first rather shunning than courting the lady.

We have before said that in early life Lord

Stratford had been no anchorite. The titled and wealthy heir of one of the first houses, he was everywhere courted and flattered. If he had entirely escaped the contagion of vice, he had been more than man.

Without being a gambler, he had played, and played high, both at home and abroad, and his losses had been considerable. Happily, however—for it effected his cure—he won a sum, which lost, had not occasioned him a moment's disturbance, but which had sufficed to ruin his adversary with a less generous man than himself.

On discovery of the true state of the case, the debt, with a single condition annexed to it, was cancelled. This condition—one which he equally imposed on himself, and religiously kept—was the renunciation of the gaming-table.

Nor was gambling the only folly of which Lord Stratford had been guilty. He had measured swords with a gallant offshoot of nobility in defence of the brittle virtue of some fair daughter of Eve, worth neither the time nor the trouble expended upon her. In short, the minority of the young lord had been marked by as fair an average of light artillery in the shape of accidents and offences as the career of most minors of nearly limitless means ; and with this not over creditable quantum of mundane experience, he might have been supposed to be as

acute a judge of human infirmity and human depravity as Herbert Malgrove, whose purer, if not higher, nature had never mixed in such scenes at all.

Cold, icy cold, it is true, was the demeanour of Lady Graham—faultless, if marble constitute faultlessness ; but was this outward seeming the veil to modesty or levity of soul ? Was it the true or the false—pure gold, or its counterfeit ? Did no volcano burn beneath this frozen zone of chastity ? Geyser's boiling fount rages in the wintry bosom of Hecla, and beneath the calm, cold exterior of the Lady Graham, within the innermost folds of a hard unloving heart, one flame glowed fiercely, though steadily. It glowed not for her husband, no, nor for her child, nothing so hallowed found admission there. The love—if an unsanctioned passion may be called by so sweet and sacred a name—at any rate all of love a heart so frigid, and yet so fierce, had to bestow, was given to Lord Castleton, or, rather to Lord Stratford (for it was years before his father's death), who, all unconscious of the honour conferred, continued to regard her ladyship in the light of a model wife and mother ; perhaps, too, he annexed to these titles that of the model friend.

To resume. The comrades with whom Castleton had journeyed, left him, after a few weeks,

to the solitude of his hotel, while they crossed the Simplon into Italy. The Grahams, too, had at last left for the South of France, his lordship being, after all, foiled in his desire to see "the child," to whom, by way of compensation to himself for this disappointment, he sent a carriage full of toys and a miniature library; and four years earlier in her young life, Helen Graham, now fourteen, might have been amused by the one, if not much edified by the other. Modern works, "expressly adapted for the capacity of the young," as the title-page duly sets forth, seem calculated rather for the torture than the enlightenment of the juvenile mind. Alas! while the brain is overcharged, the imagination is left to starve.

CHAPTER VIII.

Love, 'tis a crazy craft to launch on the wild waters of uncertainty, yet all will pull at the oar till it is swamped in the troubled waters.

CASTLETON was one day threading his way through the crowded streets of Paris, when he observed a gentleman particularly well mounted suddenly rein in his horse, as a child ran at utmost speed across the road immediately in front of him. The next moment a shriek rent the air. The

little fellow lay struggling beneath the powerful animal the stranger bestrode.

Castleton saw at a glance that, fearful as was the child's position, if the horse could be kept perfectly still it might be saved. He seized the bridle, which had slackened in the hold of the alarmed rider, and gently patted the animal, while the mother of the little imp of mischief released it, covered with dust, and yelling like twenty furies, but wholly unhurt, from his perilous quarters. A crowd quickly assembled, however, and the unfortunate equestrian was loaded with invectives not the less bitter that he was an Englishman, and one apparently but little conversant with the language; but he must have been dull indeed not to have understood and appreciated to their full extent such terms as those in which he was apostrophized. As if the force of language had at last attained its climax, the whole volume of the mater dolorosa's wrath exploded in those two most expressive words, "English brute!" for she disdained even to clothe the opprobrious epithets in her native tongue.

In vain did "perfidious Albion," who had eagerly dismounted on the child's release, advance towards the incensed matron, proffering the most contrite apologies, enforcing them with an argument generally allowed to be, of all others, the most

persuasive ; he would, without further ceremony, have been handed over to the tender mercies of the gens-d'arme, had not Castleton stepped forward and completely exonerated him from a shadow of blame in the affair, even testifying to his promptitude and skill in reining in an animal in full career, as well as to his subsequent humane courtesy. The tide of popular indignation turned at once, and a furtive smile was on many a lip, as Castleton wound up with a delicate hint to the matron on the expedience of taking better care of the urchin for the future.

He then tendered his card to the stranger, with the assurance that he should, in the event of further annoyance—the which he did not apprehend—“be proud if he could be of service to him.”

After a warm acknowledgment from his young countryman, Castleton walked on, or rather attempted to do so, for his course was impeded by the still loitering crowd, and he was at last completely hemmed in, with a horse's snorting head literally christening his shirt-front. The rider of the animal, a man of distinguished bearing, smilingly apologized, making the utmost effort the limited space allowed to free him from his novel companion, and Stratford, raising his hat in acknowledgment of the courtesy, moved on without further hindrance.

It was in the evening of the same day that Castleton's servant entered with the card of the Count de Malcé. The name seemed familiar to him, and on entering the room into which the visitor had been conducted, Stratford was convinced that they had met before. The count was tall, thin, very pale, and very gentleman-like. He might have passed some few summers over what is termed the prime of life, but premature decay, rather than the hand of time, had traced the deep lines upon the otherwise clear and expansive brow, from which the hair, entirely silvered, was thrown back, and by its snowy hue added to the majesty and reverence of his appearance. The smile with which he greeted Castleton as he entered, was so expressive of benignity, that his lordship was charmed before he had half completed his apology for the intrusion.

"I entreat that you will believe I am much honoured by a visit from the Count de Malcé, even if I only recognize in him the courteous stranger of the morning ; but if, as I more than suspect, I have the double happiness of seeing in him an old and valued friend of my late father, need I say he is indeed most welcome."

Eagerly the count grasped Stratford's extended hand. "My dear lord ! I am not then mistaken ; I scarcely thought I could be. You

are the son of my friend Castleton—pardon me—yes, yes, I know all—I loved your noble father—this is the only excuse I have to offer for beating up your quarters in so cavalier a manner. Yes, I held Lord Castleton in high esteem; I will not say our intimacy was great—circumstances combined to prevent it; but I am sure our friendship was sincere.”

“Then may I venture to hope,” returned Castleton, still holding the count’s hand, for he was strangely prepossessed, “that the friendship by which my father was so honoured may be extended to his son?”

There was a winning softness, a kind of trustiness in Stratford’s tone and manner whenever he addressed one much his superior in years, or whom he held in reverence, which was very captivating. The count seemed sensible of this charm, for he answered with eager earnestness—

“Willingly, most willingly, my dear Castleton. I was struck by your resemblance to my friend when I saw you for the first time this morning. I had been watching the fracas with ‘young England,’ and was about to proffer assistance, when your championship brought him off so triumphantly; evidently he fancied himself in a ticklish position. Well, I was speculating upon the chances of your being the son of my old friend,

when my Bucephalus peered so unceremoniously over your shoulder ; a second, and your hat was raised, and my doubts all but resolved. Why I did not speak, I can't for my life tell ; but you were presently out of sight and hearing, so I spurred on my horse after your hero of the prancing steed—to whom I remembered you had given your card—and found my surmise verified. Barely allowing you time for your after dinner siesta, I repaired to your hotel, *et voilà la farce finit*. I hope it will end as auspiciously with our friend of the morning, not that there is anything to apprehend ; the French are an excitable people, but they have no ill-nature, and if they had he has really done nothing to provoke it, though I am sure he had a floating vision of the Bastile in his mind's eye when I overtook him. If a party of gens-d'arme had been at his heels he could scarcely have ridden more furiously ; I had well-nigh given up the chase. That was a fine animal he bestrode, and nothing but the beautiful instinct of the creature in standing so motionless could have saved the young rascal."

From that day Castleton and the Count de Malcé were inseparable. Each seemed to be inspired with the warmest friendship the one for the other. The count had long been in a declining state of health, in fact it soon became

apparent that his life literally hung upon a thread. There were times, indeed, when he himself seemed strangely anxious to impress Castleton with this conviction, when he would calmly advert to his death as an event not likely to be long retarded. Inexpressibly pained, Castleton sought to draw him from its contemplation. "Well, well, my friend," he would say, "we will speak of something more cheering; I see it distresses you. Ah, Stratford! I must soon accustom another to its contemplation. To her—to my child—the blow will indeed be severe, motherless! fatherless! I am so thankful I have you with me. I do not think I can greet her return with the intelligence myself."

The rupture of a blood-vessel reduced the strength of the count fearfully. Slowly, but too surely, life was ebbing away, and his child was sent for.

The evening of her expected return Castleton absented himself, that there might be no restraint on the reunion of two so closely allied, under circumstances so more than painful. But she did not come that evening.

When he paid his accustomed visit next morning, it was without a thought apart from his sick friend; but he had entered inopportunely. Mdlle. de Malcé had but just arrived. Retreat was, however, impossible, for

the count, looking up, eagerly extended his hand.

"Allow me to introduce my daughter to you. Florence, my love, this is my dear friend, Lord Castleton."

Very slowly the young lady disengaged herself from the encircling arms of her father, and turned to the earl, who, in despite of his polished breeding, obviously started, as in manifest confusion he returned her salutation. Well indeed might his lordship gaze in wonderment upon the young daughter of De Malcé.

"Oh ! not the visioned poet in his dreams,
When silvery clouds float through his wilder'd brain,
When every sight of lovely, wild, and grand
Astonishes, enraptures, elevates ;
When fancy at a glance combines
The wondrous and the beautiful,
So bright, so fair, so wild a shape
Hath ever yet beheld."

Never at least had such a vision met the rapt gaze of Lord Castleton ; never, in the wildest flight of his imagination, had he conceived a form of such entrancing sweetness.

At the moment of her entrance she had thrown herself in an agony of grief upon her father's bosom, her hat had fallen back, and the clustering curls of burnished gold hung in negligent profusion over her shoulders. Excitement had

heightened every charm, and when she turned that glowing and beautiful face to Castleton, tears floating in the deep violet eyes, and glittering on their long-fringed lashes, no marvel he gazed spell-bound.

Castleton had heard the count mention his daughter, it is true, but only in such general terms as a father's tenderness made natural, while among the few friends whom he had met at the count's, none had, in their inquiries after her, exceeded the ordinary forms of kindness and courtesy. But the mystery, if mystery there were, was soon unravelled. Florence, from her extreme youth, for she was under eighteen, had hitherto lived the life of a recluse. At La Garde, in the sunny province of Normandy, she had, under the tender guardianship of her father, resided up to the present period.

The count might, indeed, have been said to live out of the world, for his child was the world to him, and had been so since his gentle wife faded from his sight.

When Florence was a child he would sit for hours with her tiny fingers twined within his, gazing with idolatry into her speaking face, or watch her gambols as she frolicked in fairy glee beside her little pet greyhound through the gardens of the château, or fed her birds, and tended her flowers, gathering ever the sweetest for him.

There was another inmate, however, of Château La Garde who was very warmly loved ; all the affection the wild but gentle girl could spare from an idolized father she lavished upon Madame St. Géran, a lady of advanced years, who had resided with the family from the period of the count's marriage, and had, since the death of the countess, devoted herself to the " mitherless bairn."

This kind, but simple-hearted old lady, Miss Florence alternately caressed and tormented, but as she loved her very dearly they were supremely happy in each other.

It was little enough of the outer world the bright young heiress knew. Château La Garde was her " happy valley," and, unlike the Abyssinian prince, she sighed for nothing beyond it. Sportive as the fawn that shared her gambols, and not less innocent, life was one long, long holiday to her.

Occasionally the count would pay a visit to the Hotel Ligne, his residence near Paris, but he was always impatient to get back to his darling. It was on the last of these that, finding himself likely to be detained longer than usual, he consented to his daughter's spending a month or two with their old friends, the Marquis and Marchioness S. Marée. He had a presentiment that this separation from his child

would be their last, save the one when he would take a yet longer journey ; but he had desired to spare her the pang of learning this sooner than was absolutely needful. Rapidly-increasing weakness, however, rendered it imperative that she should be summoned home, if that could be called home which she scarcely knew, but at any rate to her father's side.

When Castleton had recovered from the surprise of seeing in Mdle. de Malcé a tall young lady, for, in addition to other delusions, he had strangely enough imbibed a notion that she was a mere child, he turned with intent to apologize for his intrusion, but the bird had taken wing, and he began almost to doubt if indeed that form of light and loveliness he had beheld was a being of life, or but a phantom, sent to cheat his imagination, and dazzle his senses ; but evening confirmed the reality of the vision, and if in the morning his senses were captivated by the beauty of the youthful heiress, the evening completed the conquest of his understanding, for the play of her fancy, the originality and freshness of her mind, fascinated the melancholy and half-jaded man of the world, satisfying even his fastidious and exacting nature. Yes, Stratford Castleton, the stern, uncompromising judge, whose cold, hard type of woman was embodied (as he averred) in a Lady Graham, found him-

self enthralled, heart and soul, by a child of nature, whose soft, warm heart looked on all created things but to love them ; to compassionate, and to help them.

He saw before him the ideal of his earliest imaginings, the Una of whom he had once dreamed, of whom of late he had not dared to dream, and in the solitude and silence of his chamber he buried his head in his clasped hands and wept.

Yes, for the first and only time in his life he loved, and with all the depth and passion of his earnest, manly nature. How fair a thing a woman was, he might indeed divine, but not how dear she might become. He knew too, now, how fleeting and how false had been all other sentiments he had dignified with the name of love ; again, he knew, if ever the shadow of something softer and dearer had crossed his mind, that the feeling he had cherished for Constance Greville could never have taken a warmer hue than that of the truest friendship.

How fallible is human judgment, even when it is oneself we judge. Had Lord Castleton been really sincere (and he thought himself so, when he pronounced Lady Graham his type of woman), he had never drank in such deep draughts of love from so pure a fountain as this.

It was not alone the unequalled loveliness of Florence de Malcé that threw the spell of enchantment over the fastidious noble. The tenderness of her heart, her guileless trust, her sportive fancy! these were the charms that rivetted the chain she was so unconscious of having woven. That sweet silvery laugh ringing out like a chorus of summer bids, and then her tears—her blushes!—Oh! there was not one womanly grace with which the blooming heiress of La Garde was not invested!

And yet!—and yet!—How much of peril lay in loving this fair creature! but Castleton steeped his soul to overflowing in the Elysium of his new-born happiness, nor dreamed of peril save to his own presumptuous hopes.

There was much in the circumstances under which he had first beheld this young girl calculated to captivate a man of his refined taste and chivalrous feeling. All exquisite as she was, if he had met her only in the circles of fashion, it may be questioned whether he had become so suddenly, and so entirely subjugated. But, here, in the seclusion of home, hovering over the couch of a dying father, he saw her as she really was; with a heart so warm and soft that it made you sigh to think how deeply sorrow or wrong might sink into it if either came near, and one, alas!

one heavy sorrow was even now overshadowing her with its raven wing.

Some such thoughts, indeed, must have been pressing heavily upon the invalid, as Stratford one morning took his seat beside him. His child leant lovingly over his couch, looking Hope's brightest herald, for her father, a coward only when she was by, had smiled in answer to her smiles, re-echoing the fond aspirations of her young and unawakened heart. As she kissed his wan cheek and whispered "how soon, how very soon he would be restored to health," Castleton thinking it almost profanation to doubt the fulfilment of so sweet a prophecy from such lips, smiled too, while the count, laying his hand impressively upon his, murmured "To-morrow, Stratford, to-morrow perhaps, I shall gather courage to quench the light in those bright eyes."

But to-morrow, and to-morrow, and many another morrow came and went, and still the devoted daughter, deluded by her own fond wishes, predicted his recovery, and believed in it too, with child-like faith, and if mortal aid, administered so lovingly, had had power to arrest the hand of the destroyer, too surely the father had been spared to the child—but it might not be; the fiat had gone forth!

Not for a single instant was Castleton deceived.

The unsettled brilliancy of the hollow eye, the hectic glow of the cheek, were sure and certain heralds of swift decay ; and this conviction never fell with fuller assurance upon his soul, than when in hope's brightest colours his friend would sketch scenes of future happiness—scenes, alas ! never to be realized, or if realized, without the participation of him who so generously planned them.

Borne away by the excitement of the moment, or deceived by the false spirits peculiar to this dread disease, consumption, the count would sometimes turn a half-reproachful glance upon his friend, as seeming to ask why he, too, did not join in these cheerful presages, while Florence would gaze into his face with such a beseeching timid expression, that not always able to resist the appeal, his faltering tongue confirmed what his truer judgment had fain denied.

The opinion of Madame St. Gérán was alternately swayed by the various phases of the disorder. When the elation of the count's spirits imparted a brighter lustre to his eye, and a deeper crimson to his cheek, she would hail his recovery as certain, but when exhaustion succeeded to these temporary gleams of reviving strength, she could scarcely bear up against her conviction of the hopelessness of his condition ; but these fears she dared not breathe to his child. And

thus, on all hands, was Florence deceived into a belief of her father's ultimate recovery.

CHAPTER IX.

He faded, and so calm and meek,
So softly worn, so sweetly weak,
So tearless, yet so tender, kind,
And grieved for those he left behind.

PRISONER OF CHILLON.

It was now nearly spring, and Florence, with the sanguine spirit of youth, gathered fresh hope for the invalid from this favourable season.

To his surprise, Castleton, one evening, found the little party seated in the pavilion at the further end of the grounds. The sun was low in the horizon, and though his brightest beams had shed their radiance on the day, the evening air blew chilly for the invalid, who nevertheless cheered by the scene around him, and lost in happy fancy of which his darling was the inspiration, looked better than he had done for some days. Still Castleton, with wiser prescience than theirs, conjured them to go in at once.

"Ah, now, why will you send him in?" exclaimed Florence; "it is this fresh breeze that gives papa strength, why will you always dash away our hopes?" This was said with some-

thing of the air of a spoiled child, and a spoiled child she was.

The count, however, rose, and Stratford's strong arm was eagerly tendered for his support.

"No, no, papa shall lean on *me*—be that your punishment, Lord Castleton, for driving him out of Eden," and she tried to relieve him of the beloved burthen.

"Any punishment but this, dear Mademoiselle de Malcé, I will endure, oh, so uncomplainingly!" and Florence, fearing she had given him pain, drew back.

"Well, well, I pardon you this time—I am afraid of engaging in a quarrel till I can command a champion; when papa is quite, *quite* well, he shall fling down my gage of defiance." She raised her beaming eyes to Castleton's as she spoke, and her sweet silvery laugh trilled like softest music through the air.

A shudder crept through Stratford's frame. "Quite, *quite* well!" he murmured. "Good God! can she, indeed, be so utterly deceived?" and the thought of how soon she must know all, fell like an ice-bolt upon his heart.

And must that joyous laugh be hushed, the light of hope in those bright eyes exchanged for one of mute sorrow!

With a feeling of intolerable anguish, Stratford turned to the invalid. There was a serenity

upon his brow, a calm in the eye, and a natural and even healthful glow on the cheek, that might well have beguiled one wiser than his child, into a belief of his recovery; they did not, however, deceive his friend; too well he knew that the canker-worm was within. The rose might bloom in outward beauty, but ruin was none the less within its perfumed leaves. In a few minutes he had revolved in his mind the several bearings of the case. That the count's life was ebbing fast admitted not of a doubt, that his child was in utter ignorance of this sad truth was no less certain. Was it kind to suffer her to remain under this delusion, was it even merciful to do so? If unprepared to meet the blow would it not fall with twofold violence? But who among them was to sound the note of preparation? These were questions which he had again and again asked himself. "Oh that Herbert were here! How gently he had done his spiriting!"

Madame St. Géran had all the tenderness requisite for so delicate a task, but not the necessary control over her feelings to carry her through it. To whom then could the task be delegated?

If, with his deep love for her, knocking even now so wildly at his heart, he dared take upon himself the office, had he, a comparative stranger, the right to do so? Unauthorized by her father,

he felt he had not ; yet, how terrible appeared the alternative of leaving her in ignorance of the truth.

So completely was the very existence of Florence bound up with her father's, that the annihilation of the one seemed but the too probable prelude to the destruction of the other, yet lulled into false security by the flattering nature of the disorder, separation from him was undreamed-of, and twined as he thus was round every fibre of her warm and affectionate heart, what consequences might not be apprehended, if no warning voice heralded the coming tragedy.

Vainly did Stratford, on re-entering the house, seek to shake off the gloom that hung over him, even the magic of Florence, for the first time, failed of its effect ; it even oppressed him with a yet sadder weight of woe by the very unconsciousness of danger it betrayed, and as his eye followed her graceful form as she adjusted the pillow of the invalid, held the cup to his fevered lips, or gently wiped away the cold dews that had gathered on his brow, his emotion became so intolerable that he felt it impossible to remain.

Rising somewhat abruptly, and pressing the wan transparent hand of the count to his lips with the utmost tenderness, he uttered a fer-

vent "God bless you," and turned to Florence who stood at a little distance by the open window, and who, moved by the ardour of his friendship for a being so beloved, bade him adieu with even more than her usual warmth.

"Farewell, dear Mademoiselle de Malcé, God in heaven give you fortitude!" he responded.

The low mournful tone of his voice pained and startled her, she looked up at him;—tears, which he had no longer the power to control, blinded his eyes.

Laying her hand upon his arm, she inquired "if he were not well?"

"Thank you, quite, quite well."

Unconsciously, he uttered the precise words used by Florence in the grounds when speaking of her father, they jarred upon a painful chord—his lips quivered, he tried to speak, but the effort was unavailing, and finding he could not master his emotion, he bowed his adieux to Madam St. Géran and was going, but he felt the hand of Florence, which he still held, tremble, and, looking up, saw the blood rush in a crimson tide to cheek and brow, and then receding, leave them white as sepulchral marble. With a heavy sigh, he relinquished her hand, and quitted the room.

Motionless, as if turned to stone, stood Florence de Malcé, after Stratford's departure.

In the brief space of one moment she had passed from hope to despair. Like lightning had flashed the truth—the fatal truth upon her senses. The tenderness of Lord Castleton's farewell to her father, the mournful solemnity of his words to her, his abstraction in the garden, his present agitation—all were explained, and in a manner that threatened the overthrow of her very reason.

Pressing her cold fingers to her brow to still the violence of its throbbings, she tottered to a seat. A few minutes to collect her scattered wits, a brave effort to shake off the deathlike languor stealing over her, and she followed Lord Castleton, to gain from him a confirmation of her fears, or if a doubt yet remained as to his meaning, to claim the comfort that doubt might yield. She rushed across the hall, and remembering that he had of late passed through the grounds on his way home, descended the marble steps into them, and there, leaning against a column of the portico, she found him; but it was not till her little hand pressed lightly on his arm that he roused from his deep abstraction.

“Good God, Florence!—Mademoiselle de Malcé!”

“My father! my father!” were the only

words that escaped her ere she sunk lifeless at his feet.

To raise her in his arms, to bear her to the nearest apartment, was the work of a moment.

In unutterable agony he knelt beside her. How pale, how beautiful she looked! But to the truly wretched, brief respite from woe is permitted, and she presently revived.

"Tell me, oh, Lord Castleton!—tell me I conjure you if—if—" she paused a moment, and then gasped out, "if he will die."

Shocked by the state of suffering to which he saw her reduced, Castleton hesitated what course to pursue. Her emotion sufficiently attested the fact that she was at last roused to a sense of her approaching trial; that but little, in short, remained to fill up the measure of her cup; he felt, too, that he himself had heralded the truth to her. Meanwhile, the miserable girl continued her piteous gaze into his face, seeking therein to read her answer, for Stratford was still silent.

"Will you not answer me?" she at length exclaimed. "Oh! if you *can* bid me hope, in mercyspeak; for, indeed, indeed, Lord Castleton, I do think my heart will break!"

At that moment, Stratford's own heart seemed breaking. Taking her cold hand between both his own, he gently resealed her. "Dear,

dear Mademoiselle de Malcé, your fears may have taken too strong an alarm, why this abandonment of grief?"

"Then I was deceived?" she exclaimed, in a tone of such eager joy that Castleton could have wept to hear it. "You did *not* then mean to warn me of his danger, when in such mournful accents you bade us both farewell. Oh! say you did not!" she continued yet more beseechingly, finding him still silent, "only say you did not!"

How terrible was Castleton's perplexity; if he confirmed her present mistake, nothing had been gained; if he led her back to all the horror of her late surmise, what, in her excited state, might not be apprehended?

"Oh! do not torture me by this silence, I implore you," said she, her countenance losing much of its air of eager expectation. "Tell me all I have to hope, or all I have to dread—you will not deceive me, I am sure you will not, it would be cruelty."

"It would, indeed," he echoed, "but calm yourself, dear, dearest Mademoiselle de Malcé. Oh! believe me, I have been most anxious to undeceive you, for that you were deceived I have seen with unspeakable anguish. The dread of the effect of disclosure on a heart so warm, a frame so fragile, alone restrained me from

what I now perceive was mistaken kindness, and yet—and yet—it may be that I err in filling you with these sad forebodings. Heaven grant it !”

A low convulsive sob here interrupted him.

“Why, oh, why,” she asked, in piercing accents, “was I not told this before ?”

“Nay, do not thus abandon yourself to despair, I am not the arbiter of his fate. With Heaven alone it rests.”

“And will God be a less merciful judge ?” she inquired, with a countenance in which a confiding trust once again struggled with the bitterness of her grief.

“Alas ! unhappy that I am, I fear to alarm, yet dare not bid you hope.”

“No,” she replied mournfully, shaking her head, “I will have done with hope, too long has it beguiled me. And yet,” she went on, recurring with strange tenacity to his fancied amendment, “can it indeed be that he is dying ? Never since my return have I seen him so animated as to-day, and his cough—his cough is quite gone.”

She looked timidly, wistfully in her companion's face, as if to implore him not to dash from her the last faint shadow to which she clung as for very life. Castleton could *not* bear it, he rose in the utmost disorder, then

again sat down, not venturing to look upon that pale, anguished face ; at length, in a low-broken voice, forced out by the desperation of the circumstances, he said, "I may no longer lure you on with false expectations. Alas ! the taper's light never emits so bright a glow as at the moment of its final extinction."

The last frail remnant of hope was now, indeed, rent from the bosom of the wretched girl, a yet deadlier hue stole over the marble whiteness of her face as amidst suffocating sobs she clasped her hands together in the utter abandonment of woe.

"Then, in this wide world, I shall soon be alone."

Oh ! how hardly at such a moment might Stratford Castleton forbear folding to his bosom this sorrow-stricken and most lovely girl. How severe was the struggle that restrained him from falling at her feet and pouring out his heart's deep homage before her ; but the scrupulous honour of the true-born gentleman prevailed. He *could not* profane the sanctity of a daughter's grief for a dying father by the intrusion of one whisper of an earthly love. But though delicacy forbade such an avowal, that heart must, indeed, have been cold that had censured a proffer of the most fervent friendship, and that the kneeling Stratford conjured

her to accept with such reverential, manly tenderness that Florence, rousing for the moment from her absorption of woe, placed her hand confidingly in his as pledge of its acceptance.

"My gratitude, my undying gratitude, is yours, my lord, for all your generous devotion to *him*; I will never forget it, never! Farewell, I may leave him no longer—soon, very soon we must part, I will hope not for long: Heaven in mercy will reunite the child to the father! Pray that it may be so, Lord Castleton. Farewell!"

She waved her hand, and was gone. That night Stratford remained at the Hôtel de Ligne; if the count grew suddenly worse (and who could count upon an hour in his present state) he would desire to be near him for her dear sake no less than his friend's.

Flinging himself, dressed as he was, on the couch, so lately pressed by the senseless form of her he so passionately loved, he fell into a train of thought that effectually banished sleep.

Now that he had pledged his friendship to her, the truest and warmest man ever pledged, now that she had accepted that pledge, he felt a kind of right to be near her, to watch over and protect her, and, notwithstanding the distress to which his late revelation had given birth, he

was conscious of a feeling of relief in having made it. He knew, indeed, that it would be long before the light of joy would rekindle in those sweet eyes, she would greet him no more with a smile of gladness, nor seek from him, as heretofore, some mute symbol of his opinion of the beloved one; but it was better so; better to be prepared to meet this crushing blow. Yet how often during that night did the memory of her innocent laugh, happy in its unconsciousness of ill, ring in his ears, subduing him to childlike weakness.

It was strange, he thought, that she should have been so insensible to her father's state, but it is no less singular than true, that the nearest and dearest relatives, those who have kept daily and nightly vigil over the sick couch, are often the last to perceive danger, the last to abandon hope. Is it that the idea of dissolution is too agonizing a one to be admitted, or that intensity of love blinds them to the truth? Who shall determine?

CHAPTER X.

"Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health?"

"I will."

ON entering the count's apartment early the following morning, Castleton observed Mademoiselle de Malcé leaning against the window, her head supported by her hand; she looked up as he approached, put her finger to her lip, as if to impose silence, and without a word quitted the room.

Even in that transient and imperfect glance Stratford could discern the ravages sorrow had already traced upon that bright countenance. With a heavy and half-remorseful sigh he turned to the count, in whom a visible alteration for the worse had taken place. He feebly raised his hand to Castleton, and bade him sit down by him.

"Closer, Castleton, closer; my voice fails; I have much to say, and perchance but brief space to say it in. Thank God my cough has subsided, it would impede my utterance; my handkerchief; that will do. Is the door closed? Now, Stratford, we are alone, and first let me thank you, devoutly thank you, for all your generous

friendship for me, and for no greater proof of it than you manifested yesterday. I am glad, very glad it is done. You knew how anxious I had been that some word or sign should preface the shock to my poor lorn lamb, but when I looked upon that bright face I could not, Stratford, I *could* not have the heart to quench its lustre, to change its smiles to tears."

The count paused, for voice was lost in sighs. Castleton, scarcely less moved, pressed his hand in silence.

"It was childish—very, and I thank you for sparing me the trial. I read your thoughts last night, when you left so suddenly, but I guessed not the cause of my darling's absence till her return : I knew it then. Stratford, were my life preserved a century I should never forget the expression of that face ; its helpless, hopeless gaze of misery ! The dimmed eye, the blanched lip, the smile upon it—oh, God ! such a smile ! mocking the desolation within. I knew then that the 'iron had entered into her soul !' She spoke no word, she could not speak ; I saw her lips move in the vain effort. I feigned sleep, to give her time to rally. Poor girl ! she tried hard to deceive me. I believe she thinks she has done so. Well, well ; it will soon be over, and this warning may calm the tumults of her grief."

"My dear sir, may not the milder air of La Garde—"

The count waved his hand impatiently.

"Hush, Stratford! I am no child, to be soothed by chimerical hopes, nor do you yourself place any faith in them; neither am I appalled by the approach of death. Thank heaven I can meet it with a Christian's resignation, but I will not tell you that I welcome it with the fortitude of one. There is an agonizing pang here, at my heart's core, at the thought of a separation from my child that makes a coward of me. Oh, Stratford! you cannot guess, for you are not a father, you cannot form a conception of the anguish I endure at the idea of leaving her alone in the world—the cold, false, pitiless world!"

The sick man paused, his voice grew thick. Castleton rose in extreme agitation, then re-seated himself; the eloquent blood rushed over his face, and dyed it with its crimson flush. As the count looked up their eyes met—all was told, all understood, in that one brief but most expressive glance. The hectic of a moment passed across the transparent cheek of the invalid, lighting the dim eye to unearthly brilliancy.

Castleton sunk on his knees by his side. He spoke with all the fervid eloquence, the deep emotion, peculiar to his strong, earnest nature.

"You have read my secret, sir. Oh, say you forgive its presumption! I have not dared to hope, far less to speak; but oh, De Malcé! my love is not love, *it is idolatry!*"

The count's trembling hand sought Castleton's, but for a while both were silent. The invalid was the first to break the kind of enchantment in which their senses were locked.

"Stratford, I have every confidence in you; I know, I feel your exalted worth, have proved your friendship: I am about to tax it yet further. Bend lower, my voice is fast sinking. You love my child, would do much for her, is it not so?"

"I would pour out my heart's blood for her."

"Words are powerless to thank you, Stratford, for this deep love. Its avowal has not, I confess, come upon me in the light of a surprise. For your many generous sacrifices to me my child will repay you; for she will, she must love you; and, Stratford, for the sake of that love, bear with her few faults—a frown would kill her."

Castleton's tender reply was arrested in the onset; the door was slowly opened, and Florence entered.

"We will resume this another time," said the count.

"Do I interrupt you, dear papa?" she asked

in so low and altered a tone that it went to the hearts of her hearers.

"No, my darling ; or if you do, the sight of you is too precious to heed it. By-and-by you shall walk in the garden while I talk to Stratford ; the air will bring back the truant roses to those pale cheeks."

She smiled faintly, and with listless steps turned to the window.

Castleton's eye followed her with yearning solicitude.

"Nay, come hither, dearest," said her father, "sit near to us, to Castleton, the best and truest friend man ever had. I love him, Florence ; next to my heart's treasure, I love him. When you entered, I was about to charge him with some directions which, I am sure, he will fulfil, when death—" But, with a wild and distracted air, she interrupted him. "Nay, be composed, my best love."

"I will, I will," she exclaimed, throwing her arms round him, "but spare me *now*," her head was buried in the pillows in an agony of sobs.

Her father gazed upon her prostrate form for a few seconds with inexpressible tenderness, then motioned Castleton to remove her.

"The sight of her grief destroys the little fortitude I have left, and God knows I shall need it all ;" but as Stratford attempted gently to

raise her, she waved her hand. "I will be calm," she answered, "quite calm, I cannot leave him."

* * * * *

The next day the count rallied, and was, for some hours, closeted with his solicitor. The day following he became much worse. His child hung over him, well-nigh paralyzed by the impending blow. He feebly asked for Castleton.

"He is here, dear papa, he has never left you."

"I know he has not, I know it, and he will never leave, never forsake my precious one; he will be her tenderest friend and protector when I have passed into that better world where dwells your sainted mother. Listen, dear one, my child will not deny her father's last prayer, I am sure she will not;" he looked earnestly into her face, on which no expression but one of devotion to him, blended with unutterable grief, could be traced. "You will not deny me, dear one?"

"Ah! can you think it?" she tenderly asked, kneeling, and winding her arms round him. "Oh, papa! papa! that I could die now, this minute, so that you might be saved. Oh, speak your wish, dear, darling papa! solemnly, I pledge myself to its fulfilment."

In extreme agitation, Castleton drew near; he saw that she was wholly unconscious of her father's meaning.

"Thanks for that promise, my child; it is my sweetest consolation in this sad hour. Now, hear me, and for my sake, with all the fortitude you can command."

She stifled a rising sob, and smiled upon him, to show how much she had, but oh, the bitterness of masking the soul's anguish beneath so treacherous a wile!

"My own darling! I knew, I knew you would try. Ah, Florence! this truant heart, even now, wanders from its heavenly home, and turns with lingering fondness to its last earthly treasure;—but I die happy in your promise," and his hand was laid upon the head of his kneeling child.

"Yes, there is one who, when I am gone, will more than supply to you a father's loss, who loves you deeply, devotedly."

Very slowly had the young girl raised her head, as the count proceeded; at the last words she started, half rose, and looked fixedly, through blinding tears, into his face, to seek his meaning. Castleton sank on his knees at her side. Her eyes wandered from one to the other, and then, as a burning blush overspread her features, she hid her face in her father's bosom.

"Oh, Florence !" murmured Castleton in love's own accents, "in such an hour I dare not hope, I dare not plead, unless it be for pardon."

"Look up, my child," whispered her father ;—and she did look up, but it was only for a moment ; yet, in that single moment Castleton read in her face an expression of mingled surprise, grief, and confusion, he almost thought fear ; but not one gleam of love. He even fancied she recoiled, shuddered, beneath his light touch.

A thrill of bitter disappointment struck to his heart, he rose from his suppliant posture.

"Nay, dear one," urged her father, "tell me that I am not mistaken ;—that you yield to my prayer, that you will fulfil your promise."

The face was again bent low over her father's bosom, but no sound issued from her lips. "My darling will not rob me of my last hope, she will not revoke her promise ;—say only that you will yield to my prayer."

"Hold ! hold, dear sir, I conjure you," interrupted Castleton in an impassioned voice. "Enforce not !—urge not !"

He paused—silenced by an expression of acute pain in the count's features. Was this a time to offer opposition, to withhold the last solace to a dying parent ? Yet, every high and honourable feeling, every principle of delicacy, revolted from

the thought of obtaining a reluctant and enforced consent from the daughter ; of taking advantage, in fact, of the weakness of her position under circumstances so heart-rending. Inestimable as was the treasure of Mademoiselle de Malcé's love, he could not purchase it at the expense of honour, he could not stoop to owe its possession to an extorted promise to another ; but, resolved no further to distress the count, he decided, for the present, to remain a mere passive instrument in the hands of fate.

Stratford knew well the child's devotion to the father, he knew that she would yield her consent, but his inward conviction was that he should owe that consent to her tenderness for that father alone. Should she, however, hereafter acknowledge that it was wrung from her by his dying prayer—then would he resign her, though the sacrifice should drain the life-blood from out his being. So thought, so resolved Lord Castleton at that moment, under the influence of his despairing feeling, but, alas for man's infirmity of purpose ! a feather's weight can turn the scale. Whether the last words of Stratford struck to the heart of Florence, and despite its deep of anguish, awakened a feeling akin to love or remorse, certain it is, that when he again turned to the sick couch, his friend's countenance wore an expression of calm satisfaction, though the

hand of death was yet more visibly impressed upon it.

Absorbed as he had been, Castleton had not heard what had passed between the father and daughter, but now the count looked anxiously towards him, and he flew to his side.

"Your hand, my friend ; your hand, Stratford," he exclaimed in a tone of earnest solemnity. "You love my child ?"

"God knows how fervently !" was the response in tones as earnest and no less solemn.

"To your care, then, I consign her, in the fullest confidence and trust."

On his knees, Castleton religiously pledged himself never to violate that sacred trust. "May Heaven reward or punish me, as I fulfil or break this holy compact."

"Take her, then, Stratford, most precious of friends ! take her. Be to her, father, guardian, husband !" and he placed the ice-cold hand of his daughter in Castleton's ; but moved by an impulse, no longer within his power to control, Stratford caught her to his bosom in a flood of tenderness.

"A father's best blessing rest on you both !" murmured the dying man. "God—God bless you."

His head fell back in the utterance of this solemn farewell and blessing ; the hands, as if

invoking heaven in their behalf, were raised—a quivering sigh broke upon the silence, and all was over.

CHAPTER XI.

This girl was so young—so young !—and already she had learned to suffer.—MISS BRADDON.

THERE are but few in a world brimful of woe, over whom the winged visitant of Death has not spread his sable pall. To those few no page, however eloquent, could convey an adequate picture of the desolation of a human soul under the first stunning effects of such a sorrow as the loss of an only and idolized parent.

A veil must be drawn over the sufferings of the doubly-orphaned girl during the first few weeks succeeding her father's dissolution ; suffice it, that the anguish of her mind left it for some time doubtful whether she would long survive him. Nor would it be easy to imagine what—pending this melancholy pause—were the feelings of Lord Castleton, who, to all the agony he experienced lest Death should claim a being so dear to him, suffered the additional torture of suspense as to the real nature of the feelings she entertained towards him.

Only once had they met since the closing scene, and that was in the death-chamber, on

the day that the ashes of the count were removed for interment in the vaults of his ancestors at La Garde.

Cold, and almost as lifeless as the remains over which she had hung, had Castleton conveyed her in his arms to her chamber, and then silently followed in the mournful procession.

How he yearned to be near her, to be permitted to soothe by tenderest love her heavy, heavy sorrow ; but the same sad answer to his anxious inquiries of the physician was returned : " Mdle. de Malcé's very life depended upon the perfect repose he prescribed for her."

Had that kind physician divined how close was the tie by which the Earl of Castleton was bound to his fair patient, how different had been his prescription. Repose, indeed, he had not ignored ; but that repose would have been more certainly assured to the sick and sorrowing girl, if her sighs had been breathed upon the pitying breast of one so entirely loved and trusted by the lost one, even though every feeling of her inmost soul were, for the time being at least, buried with that dead father. Tears dried by the gentle hand of love are robbed of half their bitterness. But the physician did not know all this, and Castleton, alarmed for her safety, dared infringe no law so arbitrarily laid down. Again, too, he recalled to mind with exquisite pain that

no request through Madame St. Gérán had been made to see him though but for a single brief minute, no word penned to relieve the torture of a suspense she could not but know to be almost beyond endurance.

Gentle, feminine messages, it is true, reached him ; but one word warm from the heart had been more to him than a score of these stereotyped civilities—"She was better, always better"—a bulletin as invariably contradicted by the tears and sighs of the ambassadress. Yet with what longing, lingering solicitude he hung upon each word she uttered, clinging to the fond hope that this time, oh ! surely this time, a wish would be expressed to see him, though but for that fleeting moment to which from frequent disappointment he had now bounded his hopes. In vain ;—not the faintest intimation of such desire reached him.

How was it Lord Castleton failed to penetrate the mystery here ? Did he forget that, withheld by fears for her life, by, it might be, overstrained apprehensions of appearing to intrude his claims upon her, no wish, no prayer on his part had forestalled such request on hers ? Absorbed by his love, it did not occur to him that she, too, might be sorrowing over that faint show of regard which had been content to consign a so lately affianced bride to the sole companionship

of another, though that other were the tried friend of her infancy. He did not give himself the comfort of seeking for the cause of this silence, but with self-torturing subtlety followed up a train of reasoning the least calculated to solace his wounded tenderness.

Apart from all dearer considerations, the most valued friend of her father might, he argued, without a breach of the strictest decorum, have been admitted to the presence of his daughter ; if not as lover, as friend ; if not as her betrothed husband, in the colder capacity of her guardian (for to that office, by the will of the late count, Castleton was appointed), that title had warranted, at least, an expression of kindly interest, yet, none had been breathed by the tender-hearted and garrulous old lady, whom twice and thrice a day he sought at the Hôtel de Ligne with such anxious solicitude. Thus link upon link was added to the chain of misgivings that distracted his mind, and by their incessant recurrence deepened at last into the withering conviction that his suit was tacitly rejected. Such, indeed, to his sensitive apprehension had her silence to her father's appeal indicated, for he knew not the import of those whispered words sighed out on her father's bosom. And if it proved so, why then she should be free, though at his own life's sacrifice. Yes, if her slow con-

sent had indeed been wrung from her by the force of circumstances, in that awful hour when opposition to the prayer of a dying father had perchance snapped asunder the last frail thread of life, then every high and honourable feeling forbade his availing himself of it.

That Mademoiselle de Malcé would hold herself bound to fulfil a contract to which tacitly, however reluctantly, she had pledged herself, only deepened the moral obligation he was under to release her from that engagement.

So exalted had been the opinion entertained by the late count of the Earl of Castleton, that it is probable he had, from an early date of their acquaintance, meditated a union between him and his daughter; and when, soon after the commencement of his last illness, the conviction of his death placed before him her strangely isolated position, the solitary scion of her race, the idea gradually deepened into an ardent desire for its accomplishment. And when Castleton—hurried by the excitement of overwrought feeling into a betrayal of his sentiments—rested his hopes of aspiring to his daughter's hand upon his concurrence in them, the count at once frankly signified his approval and delight, never doubting but that the assent of his child would be as readily accorded. That she was not insensible to the merit of his friend, he knew, and

that her heart—warm and susceptible as it was—should remain proof against personal graces and accomplishments of so rare an order, he did not believe possible. Under this impression—without consulting his daughter upon a point on which her whole earthly happiness was at stake—he proceeded to make such arrangements in the disposition of his affairs as left her no power independent of Lord Castleton's will as her guardian: none whatever to revoke that consent to her union with him, yielded at the moment of her father's dissolution without the full concurrence of his lordship himself, who, though barely twenty-eight years of age, was by the count's will appointed her sole guardian, entrusted with the absolute control of her affairs, reference being made to him throughout as her affianced husband. The nuptials, however, were, by express desire rather than by legal prohibition, not to take place till his daughter should have attained the age of twenty.

In the interim Madame, or Mamma St. Gérant—as she was fondly called—remained the nominal guardian of the heiress. With her Florence was to reside, whether at home or abroad.

That the Count de Malcé, endowed with solidity of judgment and vivid powers of discrimination, should have entrusted the guardianship of his daughter to so young a man as Lord Cas-

tleton—however distinguished by moral and intellectual worth—was sufficiently extraordinary; but that he should have overlooked the nicer point of delicacy on which that circumstance hinged, namely, their relative position to each other as affianced in marriage, was matter of astonishment even to Castleton himself. In Florence it excited no surprise. Too inexperienced to speculate upon the world's opinions, unconscious indeed that it would form any, she saw in this arrangement of her father only an additional proof of his tender solicitude for her welfare and happiness, and such it was, for to what abler guardianship, he had mentally argued, could he entrust his daughter than to him who would one day be her natural protector? There was yet another motive influencing the count (whose perspicacity had been less at fault than was imagined) in his selection of the Earl of Castleton as the guardian of his child. He knew that the very virtues and engaging qualities of that child would, with her total inexperience, the result of a life of almost cloistral seclusion, lead her into error, if not precipitate her into innumerable follies. Viewing all things through the medium of an exaggerated fancy, colouring them with the brightest hues of that fancy, she would be perpetually led astray.

Her warm heart paused for no appeal to her

judgment, her lovingkindness embraced all. Then her generosity bordered upon profusion, her affection on enthusiasm. Believing all good, distrusting all evil, unable even to comprehend this last—through her very guilelessness she would be liable to be betrayed. To a father's prescient eye, it needed the judicious yet gentle hand of affection to control and regulate such a disposition without undermining its warm and simple impulses, and none in the count's judgment had appeared so eminently gifted with the power to win and maintain this twofold influence over her as the Earl of Castleton; for heedfully had he been weighed in the balance by the anxious father. It had not escaped his discernment that, mingled with the most chivalrous generosity, the most exalted humanity, there was in him an uncompromising decision of character that raised him far above the ordinary level. He was one to whom men would look up—with equal reverence and love, and when to the spontaneous homage such a character inspired, was superadded an affection for his child which he himself had pronounced "idolatry," it could scarcely be matter of wonder that he should be the one, beyond all others, delegated with authority over her—such authority, the father fondly believed, as would curb, but not crush; for however amenable to the

gentle law of love, Florence would not be unlikely to droop beneath that of harshness or neglect.

And now let us inquire how it had fared with the orphan herself under the weight of the first real sorrow of her young and innocent life—the first, for she was a child when a mother's love was taken from her ; since then her griefs had been bounded to the loss of a favourite bird, or pet spaniel, and they were bitter tears shed over these losses, for childhood's tears are bitter, but transient as bitter. But this was real, substantial woe, and the young mourner seemed powerless to cope with it. She had never before stood face to face with death, and it awed as well as agonized her.

At times, indeed, the remembrance of her plighted troth would break in upon her misery, and then the rapid pulsations of her heart proved it yet awake to nature and to love ; but oftener would she sorrow as one without hope, yielding to, rather than by any effort seeking to conquer, a grief she believed no earthly power could assuage.

Thus rolled on a second week of unequalled anguish ; with the third came back a more vivid recollection of her betrothal to Lord Castleton.

And had Florence shared in the misgivings

that had haunted her lover's mind? Did she, grieving over his apparent quiescence in their separation, question the loyalty of one so lately pledged to her under circumstances so solemn as to be doubly binding? No! so entirely was mistrust a stranger to her generous nature, that not once had she dishonoured his truth by the faintest breathing of a doubt, though the tears would tremble in her eyes and a sigh of disappointment escaped her, when, day after day, Mamma St. Géran returned from her brief interview with her guardian and still no petition was preferred to see her. Pained, perplexed though she was, she sought to excuse him. Oh! anything but doubt.

How, indeed, could she do this? Amidst an agony of reminiscences, memory too vividly recalled that passionate embrace by the couch of her dying father. Again, the wild grief, the unutterable tenderness with which he had folded her to his bosom when he bore her half-lifeless from the death chamber; and then, with a burst of gratitude, came the recollection of his unceasing watch over the "lost one." *She doubt him!*

Yet he, forgetful how new was her love—her yet unacknowledged love—expected from her the first overtures that they should meet. Truly such expectation, such hope, savoured

little of the "Graham type," so lately his fancied beau idéal of woman!

At last a letter from Herbert, to whom every emotion of his soul had been laid bare—a letter in which, mistrusting utterly all cause for his lover-like apprehensions of indifference on the part of Mademoiselle de Malcé, arrived, counselling him, at all hazards, to see her, and Stratford, it may be believed, was not slow to act upon this counsel. Happily, Florence had that morning removed to the drawing-room, and was, Mamma St. Géran assured his lordship, less languid than she had yet seen her. A note was hurriedly penned, praying to be admitted; he had, he said, a letter which he had pledged himself to deliver in person. "Let this," Stratford urged in conclusion, "plead my excuse for an intrusion upon that privacy which, *unsolicited*, I have not hitherto presumed to invade."

Excited by the mention of a letter which Florence but too well divined could have been consigned to her guardian's care only by one beloved hand, she failed to remark the coldness and constraint of the note.

A single line answered it, but that was sufficiently eloquent of anxiety to see him, to lift a load from Castleton's breast.

"Florence is dying to see you!" exclaimed

the kind old lady. (The French are singularly emphatic in their expressions.) The lady's hand was raised to his lips with a gesture no less emphatic than had been her words, and he was half-way up the staircase when his flying steps were arrested by a "Stay, my dear lord, I have been thinking that as she is so anxious to see you on account of this letter, which——" but Castleton paused for no more, though slowly enough he now ascended step by step. Her anxiety was explained—he had no share in it then.

Florence received him almost in silence—deep feeling *is* silent. Though little more than a fortnight had elapsed since they last met, she had lived whole ages in suffering, and time, computed by its throes, falls heavily indeed upon the sufferer.

Castleton's greeting was at once reverential and affectionate. All the chivalrous tenderness of his nature was roused at sight of one so lovely, so lonely, and so defenceless—an orphan indeed, unprotected by his strong arm and heart.

And Florence ;—her thoughts forced back upon the past by the presence of one whom she now beheld in the new and startling light of a betrothed husband—could not but remember that in reference to him all had been too hurried

and sudden. That no vows of love—such love as lovers dream—no ardent wooing had precluded that compact to which she had silently, but irrevocably, pledged herself—that she was in truth affianced rather by the mediation of another than by any act or avowal of his or her own; and with something of maiden delicacy, something even of wounded pride, she recoiled from the thought of being “won unwooed.”

It was perhaps natural, but it was most unfortunate, that at that moment, when flinging from him all doubts, her lover's heart was full to overflowing, such memories should force their presence upon her. Unconsciously, they lent an air of constraint to her manner the most foreign to her real feelings. The child of impulse, she never paused to regulate her demeanour by any standard of artificial decorum, her native purity was her truest and only safeguard, but here it proved traitor to her heart.

Presently, she extended her hand for the letter; Stratford held it back with a look which implored her not yet to open it. She understood him, and pointed to the table on which he laid it.

“You doubt my courage,” she faltered, making a painful effort at a smile.

“I hope everything from your fortitude,” he returned, rallying from the oppression that

weighed down his spirit on seeing her so changed.

After a pause, she said in a low voice, "How much, oh ! how much I have to thank you for, my lord, for *his* dear sake. Oh ! believe me, I am not ungrateful !"

"I entreat ! I implore !" interrupted Castleton, in extreme emotion. "If—if you could read my heart !"

It was too late to recall that last word, yet he had fain done so, for to conceal the rising blush, Florence turned her head, and in so doing her eye fell upon the letter, and another interest was awakened. She raised it, gazed a moment at the superscription traced by that beloved hand now cold in death, pressed it passionately to her lips, and resting her head upon her folded arms burst into a passion of tears.

Sighing heavily over this evidence of her courage, Castleton now regretted that he had not delayed the delivery of the letter; but apart from the knowledge that it was written rather to occasion a diversion to her thoughts than to distress them, there is something in a promise yielded to the dying which impresses you with a double weight of responsibility; in this case, too, it afforded a plea for his petition for an interview.

It was natural that Florence should yearn to

read this letter, and as on rallying her spirits she continued to gaze wistfully at it, without however attempting to break the seal, Castleton in the tenderest terms now besought her to open it.

"Presently, — when I am alone," she returned.

Unspeakably wounded by these words, he remained silent ; yet she had but thought to spare him the pain of witnessing her emotion, an emotion which she knew herself powerless to control, and Mamma St. Géran coming in soon after, he took his leave.

And thus, unsatisfactorily to each, terminated the first real meeting of the pair since their betrothal.

CHAPTER XII.

The eye which is filled with dust
Heeds little of the true and just.

If the perusal of the count's letter cost his child many tears, it was not without a salutary effect in the main, for it contained not a few charges which she would hold it a sacred duty to perform.

To give occupation to her mind had been the

count's motive in writing. To many of her tenants at La Garde, to whom bequests were made, he sent directions through his daughter, directions which she was enjoined to see carried out. Enclosed, too, was a cheque for ten thousand francs ; but of this anon : his daughter well understood for whose use it was designed, and why the commission was entrusted to her. The letter thus concluded :

“ My Florence may, from a natural affection for the scenes of her childhood, prefer La Garde, but I confess my wishes point to a residence in England for her during the next two years of her life. She will scarcely marvel at this preference, for she knows that I have from an early age regarded that country with peculiar veneration. It is a Protestant country, in which faith my Florence has been nurtured. It is the birthplace of my wife and child. There, too, were passed the few years of my most happy wedded life, and in that country, if I am not deceived in my fondest hopes, will at no very distant day be centred the happiness of my child. Still, La Garde is your ancestral home, endeared to you by a thousand tender memories ; cherish it as such, and reverence the faithful servitors who have grown gray beneath the shadow of its walls.

“ During the next few months you will, I

hope, in company with Monsieur and Madame St. Maré, make the tour of Italy. To you these scenes will have the charm of novelty, and will help to dissipate the melancholy which my child must, I know, experience on the loss of her father, a melancholy which she will, nevertheless, exert herself to conquer, even for that father's sake, always remembering that it is one of the highest efforts of human reason to submit, un-murmuringly, to the will of heaven.

"It is my intention to appoint my most dear and valued friend, Lord Castleton, your guardian, from a conviction that I shall best promote your happiness and welfare by consigning you to the care of the most honourable of men, and if hereafter a tenderer tie should link you to him, remember, if departed spirits are permitted to look down on earth, that your union will be hallowed by the blessing of your devoted father,

"ARNAUD DE MALCÉ."

Occupied in making the necessary arrangements for an early return to La Garde, Florence had less time to brood over her late loss; her letter, too, had furnished her with an incentive to exertion, and the improvement in her health and spirits soon became apparent. She neither received nor paid visits. The few families with whom her father had been on terms of intimacy left their cards, but being total strangers to his

daughter, these civilities terminated all further intercourse.

Meanwhile Lord Castleton saw but little of his ward. In his capacity of executor the arrangement of the late count's affairs devolving so exclusively upon him, left him little leisure. Nothing, literally nothing, had been gained in the recent interview, and nothing in the present stage of affairs was likely to be gained. On the last two occasions of Stratford's visits, his ward was out for an airing, she was then better; heaven be praised for that.

Tossed on a sea of doubts and conjectures, for among them was even an apprehension that Florence might love another, Castleton awaited with strange impatience an answer to his last letter to Herbert, in which he had entered into every minute particular of his late interview with his ward. He did not disappoint his expectations, and never was billet-doux from fairest mistress opened with more eager hope.

When came there word or line from that beloved hand that breathed of aught but comfort!

"The picture you have drawn of this sweet child, Stratford, for in experience and guileless trust she seems little more, has so won upon my love, that I am envious of each sigh she breathes out of your presence, each tear that

falls on other bosom than your own. It is your privilege, it should be your dearest as well as most sacred privilege, to heal the wound heaven has thought meet to inflict.

“You are tortured by apprehensions so apparently groundless, that I cannot conceive any one but a lover entertaining them. Why this doubt of a return of her affection? Is Stratford Castleton so formed to repel a woman’s love, I would ask, that he must needs torture himself with such vain chimera? To my thinking it is a cruel injustice to make question of this lady’s love, profanation to believe it in the keeping of another, unsanctioned by her father, for unsanctioned we must know it to have been, or wherefore such warm acceptance of your suit? Your fears, the coinage of your brain, are unworthy of her whom you profess to love with such tender reverence.

“With indescribable pain I see you the victim of an overwrought sensibility, suffering all sorts of hyper-delicate scruples to rise up as barriers between you and this gentle girl. Is the wooing to come from her or from you? Would you, with your refined sense where woman is concerned, that she, in whose pure ear the voice of love or flattery has never yet been poured, would you that she cast aside the veil of modesty, behind which cluster perchance a host of tender

aspirations, and flung herself upon that bosom from which she is virtually expelled ?

“ Still do you with strange tenacity revert to what you term the shuddering recoil with which she greeted your declaration of love in that hour, mark you, that witnessed the dissolution of the only friend heaven had hitherto vouchsafed her. To my thought, too, that declaration of love seemed one made rather (and note well the distinction) by her father than by you. But any way, had she, divorcing herself from the natural anguish that scene called forth, turned to you with full and frank acceptance of these vows, I should, I confess, have deemed her less worthy of my friend.

“ Again, call to mind the suddenness of this proposal, the sacred and responsible nature of the vow to which, at a moment's notice, she was called upon to pledge herself; the awful solemnity of that scene itself—death, and the marriage bond !—and then say if these were not sufficient to scare the boldest into timid silence, or even ‘ shuddering recoil !’

“ Oh, Castleton! cease to tax this pure-minded and sorrow-stricken orphan with indifference till you have bent a suppliant at her feet for that love which, unsought, the modesty of her sex must forbid her to acknowledge.

“ Again, I say, see her at all hazards; discard

all forms of etiquette, all ice-bound laws that would fetter and still further estrange you. See her without another hour's delay. If her heart be yet unwon, go in and win it. Then plead for your reward.

"With me hope is far stronger than doubt; yet, you will not keep me in suspense. My happiness is bound up in yours.

"HERBERT MALGROVE."

"Right! Ever and always right!" exclaimed Castleton, pressing to his lips the letter with a feeling which had in it something so deep and tender, that it was akin to a woman's love. "Oh, blind idiot! senseless! and ungracious as senseless! Why did I not see all this in the light in which he has placed it? No, Herbert, not an hour, not a moment longer will I endure this torture, my doubts shall be resolved—doubts! did I say? why, I have none,—not one! By all that's absurd, I believe I must have been mad!"

And it wouldn't have taken a vast deal more to have left this impression on the minds of any who had chanced to see his lordship under this changed aspect of affairs. His gallant steed might have fairly been forgiven for doubting his rider's sanity, for he pulled up at the Hôtel de Ligne, distant from the starting-point little less than five miles, in thirteen minutes, so pro-

tested the groom, for his lordship heeded nor time nor distance, but vain the impatience of the rider, the fleetness of the steed, Mademoiselle de Malcé had just driven from the gates.

But not wearily passed the solitary hours till early evening, when once again Castleton, as was still his wont, dismounted at the garden entrance of the hotel. Choosing the sequestered paths, he presently came upon the open lawn. To his surprise, he saw a horse quietly grazing beneath a clump of trees, the reins carelessly slung over one of the branches. What could it mean? Mademoiselle de Malcé, he knew, received no visitors; he had never heard of any friends or connections of Madame St. Gérân.

Certain it was, however, that a guest had arrived, and the military accoutrements of the animal left no doubt of the vocation of that guest. His astonishment kept him standing some minutes in reverie, till recollecting that he had no right to adopt a system of espionage over his ward, however careful might be his guardianship, he decided to return, but he took another path to do so, which brought him out by the side of the Pavilion, where he had so often sat with the late count; but here his footsteps were again arrested. The sound of voices from within startled him, he fancied he heard suppressed sobs, and drawing nearer, beheld, leaning

against the trellis-work, Mademoiselle de Malcé herself, while at her feet there knelt a gentleman, ay, every inch a gentleman ; young, decidedly handsome, and an officer. One hand of the lady was pressed (reverentially enough, it is true) to his lips, in that hand was a letter, and that letter, resigned to him, was in turn pressed to his lips in all the fervour of devotion ;—a moment after it was safely housed within his bosom.

The face of Mademoiselle de Malcé, pale with emotion, and streaming with tears, was presently buried in the folds of her handkerchief ; but—Castleton saw no more. All, indeed, had been the work of a moment.

Scarcely crediting the evidence of his senses, he hurried he scarce knew, scarce cared, whither. Every doubt was now, indeed, resolved, every apprehension confirmed. The shuddering reluctance of Florence to yield to her father's wish was now accounted for, and he himself at last released from the anguish of suspense.

And was Lord Castleton the happier in this suspension of all doubts, all fears ? It is easy to theorize on this matter, affirming that the confirmation of our direst apprehensions is preferable to a state of suspense. Alas ! the faintest ray of hope that glimmers through incertitude were paradise compared to the sometime dismal truth.

To Herbert Malgrove that night, was unhappily despatched a communication, which inflicted a keener pang upon that faithful heart than had done any on his own immediate account ; still he did not arrive at conclusions quite so hastily as his friend—true, he was not in this case a lover. He saw that the matter was involved in perplexity, but until the key to unlock the mystery were discovered, judgment, he urged, should be suspended ; to that effect he wrote to Castleton, but this time, it must be owned, without the ardour and assured spirit which had, as by magic, charmed away the spectre, doubt, from his friend's mind on the previous occasion.

With Castleton, his doubts resolved, his determination was speedily taken, so far as he himself stood affected. The prompt abandonment of all claim upon Mademoiselle de Malcé's hand was inevitable. Other bearings in the affair demanded weightier consideration. Who was this young officer, unknown to, or at least unrecognized in the character of a lover, by her late father, for whom, disregarding the ceremonials of her rank, he had almost said the proprieties of her sex, Mademoiselle de Malcé had made a clandestine appointment.

That an attachment subsisted between them he dared not for a moment question, *his* suppliant attitude, *her* emotion, the letter ; pressed to

his lips with such fervour of grateful love, and reverence combined, then hastily concealed in his bosom. No, there was, alas ! no room on which to hinge a doubt ; all was corroborative of a mutual understanding between them, and of the tenderest nature.

And why, if all were well, had it been so sedulously guarded from the father's knowledge ? The lack of wealth and titles alone (and Castleton remembered that the young officer wore the uniform of one of subordinate rank) would have presented no insurmountable barrier to the approbation of the count ; he was the last man to make havoc of his child's happiness from motives of mere aggrandizement. What then, but some cause she feared to name, had impelled Florence to such inviolable secrecy, for not a moment did he entertain a doubt of the count's honour ?

Lord Castleton might have argued, and, perhaps, in his more collected moments did argue, that one so richly endowed as was the sole heiress of the ancient house of the De Malcés, and not (despite her sweet humility) altogether destitute of ancestral pride, was little likely to conceive an attachment for one whose name and character could reflect dishonour upon her choice ; and true to the nobility of his nature, Castleton mentally determined that if poverty, that most heinous of all offences, proved to be the only one

of which her young lover were guilty, it should not be suffered to operate to his prejudice, it should not, in fact, deter him from yielding his consent to their union, without which Mademoiselle de Malcé was powerless to give her own. Still the heiress of La Garde must not wed a subaltern. Well, his own fortune was princely, and to what better interest could it be put out than in the promotion of that happiness to his ward, which he would gladly lay down his life to ensure?

Thus, in the space of a single hour, Lord Castleton as thoroughly convinced himself of the more than indifference of his ward as regarded himself, and by implication of her devotion to another, as though such declaration were actually under her own hand and seal, while, with an equally precipitate amount of ingenuity, the gallant officer was enrolled on the staff of Dame Fortune's outcasts, on whom, as the favoured suitor of Mademoiselle de Malcé, he was, if approved a gentleman, with an unsoiled escutcheon, to be endowed with, at the least, the one half of his own lands and lordships.

And with this array of delectable fancies, to scare the slumber-god from his throne, the Earl of Castleton, at break of day, sought his pillow, which, it is to be feared, did not medicine him to a very enviable state of repose.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Now thou art mine," he cried, "all mine,
With life to keep, and scarce with life resign,
Now thou art mine, that sacred oath
Though sworn by one, hath bound us both."

BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

It had been one among the directions of the late count, that the Hôtel de Ligne, being only personal property, should be disposed of so soon as his daughter had withdrawn to the seclusion of La Garde, and his solicitor had more than once importuned Lord Castleton for permission to view the premises, a permission hitherto refused from an unwillingness to disturb his ward; now, however, a more stringent application being made in favour of a very eligible offer for its purchase, his lordship could scarcely without prejudice to the negotiation raise a further difficulty. With a heavy heart, therefore, he prepared for another visit to the hotel to ascertain when it should be Mdle. de Malcé's pleasure to leave for La Garde.

He found her in her boudoir, and alone, more cheerful too than he had yet seen her, for which he was at no loss mentally to assign a reason. Her greeting, wholly divested of form, was like

herself, soft and gracious. Both fair hands were held out as he entered.

"We began to think you had quite forsaken us, my lord. Mamma St. Géran says you must be shot for a deserter."

He tried to rally his spirits in vain.

"No, Florence, *I* shall not be shot for a deserter!"

Unconscious of any covert meaning attached to his words, she smiled a sunny smile, and playfully inquired "why he had been so long away."

"Perhaps," he returned, "I was apprehensive of breaking in upon Mademoiselle de Malcé's engagements."

"Mademoiselle de Malcé has but few," she responded, with a little quivering sigh, for she was wounded to the quick by his coldness, "and none that interest her."

"I mean that I may have been apprehensive of intruding when she was occupied with other visitors."

"You know I have none but you," she returned with naïveté.

"None, Florence!" and his eyes were bent earnestly upon her.

"None."

"But had you no visitor yesterday?"

"Indeed, no!" and she looked up so artlessly

that Castleton paused in amazement. Again his scrutinizing gaze rested upon her countenance, but no change passed over it, no tinge of colour betrayed her consciousness of uttering an untruth; yet it seemed incredible that she could have forgotten such a guest. Castleton was confounded by this extraordinary self-possession.

"I cry your mercy, Mademoiselle de Malcé, I thought there had been a visitor last evening in the pavilion; my senses deceived me, I pray you pardon me."

Florence started. She ventured upon no reply, but this time Castleton could not complain of the absence of blushes, her face was literally dyed in crimson, and her downcast eyes too plainly betokened her sense of his meaning.

"My lord, I—I had forgotten," she faltered, "that is, I thought—I hoped no one knew of that visitor."

His heart gave a great bound, but he merely bowed; and, after the lapse of a few minutes, apologized for delaying to acquaint her with the purport of his present call, which he then explained, adding, "You will favour me by naming a time when you think it probable that it will suit you to leave here."

"Oh! please not till after Friday—I am under an engagement not to do so; indeed, indeed I cannot!"

She spoke eagerly, excitedly, and her small white fingers intertwined together, were raised with supplicating earnestness. Again Lord Castleton bowed, and, agonized by doubts, with freezing politeness. She observed it, and in a tone of gentlest deference, asked "if he disapproved of her prolonged stay," adding, with singular simplicity, "I cannot help it, indeed—indeed, my lord, I cannot; my movements are regulated by another."

Castleton almost groaned aloud; with a yet more reserved and even stern air he replied, "I cannot disapprove of any arrangement Mademoiselle de Malcé may think proper to make; at all times I shall be honoured by her commands."

Tears sprung to the eyes of Florence at this cold and formal speech: what had she said, what done, to deserve it?

"Ah, do not talk of commands, my lord! no choice is left me; if you disapprove, I have but to submit."

Could Castleton doubt that she referred to her engagement with him as his affianced wife; she would imply that she had no alternative but submission to his will. Not another instant must she suffer under this delusion. Wounded to the soul he was, but ungenerous he could not be; pride might struggle for the lordship,

but honour and tenderness were sure to gain it in the end.

He rose precipitately. "Mdlle. de Malcé, I entreat, I implore you, speak not of submission. I acknowledge no power but your will, own no authority but as you vouchsafe to grant it, and here I resign all but the hope, the solace, the only one left me, of being permitted to administer to your happiness in the way best calculated to promote it. That I have loved you, Florence, very dearly, I may not disavow ; that this love will prove no transient passion my heart too surely predicts ; but words are breath ; I seek not to move you to pity by a display of suffering from which there is no appeal, still less," he continued more proudly, "would I stoop to plead for the possession of that hand which, pardon me, were valueless without the inestimable treasure of the heart's affections ; I have not now to learn that these can never be mine, you have consequently nothing to apprehend from the urgency of my suit. Oh, Florence ! could you indeed think so meanly of your father's friend as to imagine he would avail himself of the power with which he invested him only to plunge his child into irretrievable misery ? Or think you I can have forgotten the dismay, the absolute recoil, with which you first received the avowal of my love ?"

At these words his ward lifted her eyes in apparent wonder, but as she made no attempt to confute them, Castleton's previous impression was confirmed.

"No," he went on, "its memory has haunted me night and day ; but I weary you, and linger over a declaration which must for ever dispel my transient dream of bliss. Let me not longer hesitate," he continued, in a voice broken from emotion, "to yield up my own happiness to insure hers for whom life itself were all too poor a sacrifice."

"I—I do not understand you, my lord," she faltered.

"I mean," he returned, apparently nerving himself for a last effort, "that I abandon every hope ; though I cannot make, I will not be the destroyer, of your peace. Mdle. de Malcé ! Florence ! I resign you to—to—"

"To whom, my lord ?"

And the graceful head was thrown back with just the faintest indication of pride.

"To whom, my lord, I pray you ?"

"Ah, spare me, Florence ! at such a moment, when I would grasp at the little all of self-control left ; spare me, I conjure you, a recollection of the scene I witnessed last evening. A suppliant lover ! your sighs ! your tears ! your gaze of unspeakable tenderness ! But this is

miserable folly: let it suffice that you are free."

Castleton broke down, and when, after a vain effort at composure, he again turned to his ward, there was an indefinable expression in her countenance. It was not precisely embarrassment, though a blush tinged her cheek, still less was it sorrow, though her eyes were flooded in tears, nor quite joy, and yet a smile played on her lips, —perhaps it was more expressive of triumph than any other feeling.

"This is the refinement of cruelty," muttered Castleton; "she might have spared me this."

In truth triumph *was* the predominant emotion in the breast of Florence at this moment. Lord Castleton had avowed his love in terms which left not a doubt either of its ardour or its sincerity; the late coldness which had so pained and surprised her was accounted for, and in a manner not unpleasing to her woman's pride, or her woman's tenderness; and perhaps the consciousness that a tinge of jealousy was mingled with her lover's feelings was not the least gratifying accompaniment.

It might, therefore, be that just a shade of coquetry was paramount, as she turned that beaming face upon him.

"I regret, my lord, that in this instance—" she began.

But hurriedly, even haughtily, he interposed ; the fear, the dread, that she was about to tender some apology for her indifference alarmed him. Where he had adventured for a far higher stake he could not condescend to accept pity.

"Spare me, Mademoiselle de Malcé, I entreat you, the humiliating proffer of your compassion."

"My lord !—compassion !"

"Compassion !—pity !—what you will. God knows I would not be ungrateful, but I have loved too honestly, and too deeply, to be soothed by such false coin as these. Full well I know affection is independent of inclination, and here I release you from all ties, and resign to another the possession of your hand and heart ; if, Florence," and he bent his eyes intently, and oh, so mournfully, yet withal so tenderly, upon her, "if he whom you love is worthy of the priceless gifts—"

Oh, not a moment would that generous girl extend her triumph. Still was she misunderstood. Dashing the tear-drop from her eye, and bending low over the couch on which from excess of emotion Castleton had now flung himself, she spoke in distinct, though very tremulous tones.

"In *my* estimation he whom I love—" (a groan escaped the tortured breast of her auditor)—

"and who so loves me, is worthy of all, and more than all, I have to bestow, and valueless as may be the gift, this hand is his if—if he will accept it."

As she thus spoke, she laid that little trembling hand in his.

Castleton sprang to his feet, gazing at the sweet downcast face in dumb amazement.

What could this mean? what was he to understand? In him whom she averred "*she loved, and who so loved her,*" did she point to the one whom he had beheld at her feet, or—oh, delirium of joy!—to himself?

True, this last interpretation was strangely at variance with all he had beheld, yet those burning blushes, that faltering voice, the slight pressure of the tiny fingers coiling round his own, sent a strange wild thrill through his heart.

"Florence! dearest! most beloved! Speak! Tell me, oh! I conjure you, tell me if indeed I am so blessed?"

"Stratford!" she murmured, as she hid her crimson face in his bosom, "how could you doubt me?"

Half frantic with his unexpected happiness, Castleton held her long in his passionate embrace, while words of softest endearment fell thick and fast on her entranced ear.

But on such a scene 'twere idle to dwell. Suffice it that the pledge which had been given to the dying De Malcé was registered in the hearts of each, and if it had not become more binding, was far more precious from the conviction that it was now the spontaneous acknowledgment of mutual affection.

"And you do confide in me," murmurs the now happy girl, her head still resting on his bosom, her eyes shaded from the ardour of his gaze by their veiled lids, "o'er which the violet vein—

"Wandering, leaves a tender stain,
Shining through the smoothest white
That e'er did softest kiss invite."

"Confide in you! Ah! my precious one! how shall I plead to be forgiven for having inflicted one pang upon that gentle heart? Heaven be my witness, my worst doubt was of my own power to awaken love!"

"Stratford!"—and Astarte's "Manfred" was not more sweet and deprecatory—"ah! you should know all if it were not the secret of another, but I violate no trust in telling you the object of this gentleman's visit; had he been less unfortunate it had never been clandestinely paid; but the same hour that made me

fatherless lost him the only friend an adverse destiny had granted him.

"For reasons he did not explain, papa made no bequest by will, but the letter entrusted to your care enclosed a cheque, which I was charged to deliver into his hands ; you may be sure I was not slow in obeying the wishes of one so dear, and as I could not delegate the trust to another, for there was much beside to say, he came here last evening by my own especial appointment ; I received him as you know," and she glanced archly up, "*in the pavilion.*"

In this recital, the simplicity, the innocent inexperience of his young ward was so transparent, that Castleton actually blushed at the recollection of his own surmises, blushed that he could have profaned by a breath a nature so pure and so ingenuous.

"Dear one, I beseech you, not another word ; as you truly say, it is the secret of another."

"Do you think, then, I have revealed too much ?—yet I should be so unhappy to leave you to a single doubt. Ah ! it was such exquisite pain to see him, charged as I was with papa's last injunctions to him."

"Why, why," interrupted Castleton, "have exposed yourself to so sharp a trial ? Why did not Madame St. Géran relieve you of this most heart-rending commission ?"

"Madame St. Géran ! ah, no, there it is, he has incurred her displeasure ; dear darling as she is, on this point she is immovable, and she will not even see him, unless he declines every overture from—"

But here Castleton playfully put his finger to his lip. The Jesuit had elicited sufficient to satisfy the most inveterate sceptic, and the most exigent of lovers.

Florence stopped in some embarrassment, she was unconsciously betraying more than she had intended. She gave him one of her magic smiles.

"You see I am not to be trusted ; it is my first secret, and I would not play the traitress. Ah, it is a sad, sad story, Mamma St. Géran shall tell it you—her one grief she calls it."

"Any way, my darling must no longer dwell upon it."

"It were scarcely safe for my secret, indeed ; you must have arrived at the pavilion at the moment I delivered the packet from papa ; my tears, Stratford, may thus be accounted for ; while the attitude of the young soldier" (and she blushed deeply) "was—not as you imagined, one of suppliance to me—but of gratitude to that beloved friend whom in this world he was never more to look upon."

It may be believed that Florence did not go

through a recital so replete with allusions to her dead father without considerable emotion ; but tears, as we have said, dried by the gentle hand of love, are robbed of half their sting.

Henceforward she could fly without reserve to the bosom that beat for her and her alone, and though she still sorrowed, it was no longer with the same withering sense of desolation, the same cold dead weight at her heart.

Absorbed as she had hitherto been by the mortal sickness of an idolized father, it was no marvel she had not paused to analyze her own feelings towards that father's friend.

That the suddenness of an appeal, such an appeal, and at such a moment as that which preceded a parent's dissolution, should have stunned, confused every sense, may be well imagined ; almost she deemed it an illusion ; yet Castleton was at her side, and words of deeper and dearer import than had yet fallen upon her ear were breathed by him whom she believed to be truth itself.

For the first time she shrunk from him, with a new and indefinable impression of—she knew not what—fear, surprise, embarrassment ! Not till she heard his impassioned tone, as he conjured her father to desist, nor force from her a reluctant acquiescence with his wishes ; not till

she beheld the struggle in his breast between the ardour of his love and the delicacy of his pride, was she roused to the full extent of that noble generosity which would have saved her, though at the sacrifice of his own most fondly-cherished hopes.

But, yet a few moments, and the scene was closed ; and in the wild anguish that followed, she remembered only that the being she had clung to through life was lost to her for ever, and that Lord Castleton was her affianced husband.

Well, the cloud that had hung over them had rolled away ; all pangs, all heart-burnings, all misgivings had given place to the fulness of confiding love ; and happiness (with no alloy but the tender sorrow for a parent's loss, which no earthly consolation might wholly assuage), reigned in the breast of the youthful betrothed.

That night, ere Stratford pressed his pillow, several closely-written pages were despatched to Herbert. To him, and to him alone, might be confided this cherished secret.

Little indeed did Castleton divine the weight of anxiety which the recent revelation of his love was fated to lift from the bosom of his friend, for he had never dreamed that Herbert conceived him to be attached to the Lady

Constance. Joy, however, at Stratford's happiness was all that at present filled the unselfish heart of Malgrove.

CHAPTER XIV.

I cannot but remember that such things were,
And were most precious to me.

MACBETH.

A FEW days after the happy understanding between Castleton and his ward, they, with Madame St. Géran, were on their way to La Garde.

If outward calm might have been relied on, Florence had kept the promise so anxiously drawn from her the preceding evening to exert all her fortitude on the occasion of leaving a home made sacred to her as the scene of a father's last moments, but the pallor of the quivering lip, the languor of the faltering step, belied that calm, and betrayed to the watchful eye of love the conflict she had undergone.

And would Stratford have had it otherwise?
No ; twice over no !

Château La Garde, the ancestral residence of the De Malcés, was on the borders of picturesque Normandy.

The road to it from the capital was in part, but only in part, diversified by charming landscape scenery, while here and there an opening in the thick foliage showed the waters of the Seine, studded with snowy sails, shining beneath as fair a sky as Italy herself could boast; nor was the general effect of the scene rendered less attractive by the song, never sad, of the pretty paysanne tripping home from the neighbouring market town.

Within a few miles of La Garde the aspect of the country changed to a more sombre character. It was sunset when the travellers reached the summit of a hill, from whence the eye caught a partial view of the château.

Slowly the carriage descended the declivity, and passing through a grove of majestic trees, entered upon an extensive plain. The whole building was then visible, though shaded on either side by lofty pines, intermingled with the spreading branches of the oak and chestnut.

It was a noble Gothic structure, La Garde, distinguished rather for an elegant and chaste simplicity than for magnitude or splendour. Many recent additions had been made, but they were in harmony with the general antique character of the whole.

A colonnade of polished marble adorned the

façade. The windows, descending to the ground, opened upon a sloping lawn, at the extremity of which rose a terrace, overlooking, amidst the arching boughs of the palm and cedar, a wide extent of pastoral country, while, in the remote perspective, and still amid umbrageous foliage, the eye could just discern the spire of a convent.

The last beams of the setting sun, mingling with the gray hues of twilight, shed their faint light over the projecting pillars, round which twined flowers of the most delicate hue and odour.

So profound was the stillness that reigned, that Nature might have been thought to slumber amid the sublimity of her works. It was, indeed, an enchanting spot, and could "auld lang syne" have been forgotten, the youthful heiress had approached this venerable seat of her forefathers with equal pride and delight; but the memory of the living, that had so lately given soul to this fair scene—the yet keener one associated with the dead—made sad havoc with happiness. Alas! what lore may school a loving heart to patient sufferance, while the arrow yet quivers in the gaping wound!

Castleton rather carried than led her through the long line of weeping domestics grown gray in the De Malcé service, that crowded the hall with sad but tender welcome to their fair young

mistress—their darling, their idol! Florence now wept without control, nature would no longer be defrauded of her rights.

Consigning his precious charge to the care of Madame St. Géran, herself deeply affected, Castleton returned to the hall, to assure these faithful hearts that their lady would see them so soon as she had acquired a little more fortitude to bear the trial; that, meanwhile, her heart was wholly with them, and that through him she sent them loving thanks for their sympathy. The benignity of Castleton's manner, his unmistakable feeling with, and for them, won the hearts of these simple followers of the family; and, as if reading the nature of the bond between him and the orphan-heiress, they one and all bowed with a deep obeisance as each invoked a blessing on her and him. Castleton's empire over them was tacitly acknowledged in that blessing; and, in a broken voice, he again thanked them, and in their lady's name returned the benediction.

When Stratford, after a lingering farewell, betook himself for the night to the humble hôtellerie dignified by the name of an auberge, his heart throbbed high with its full content of happiness. What a treasure had he won in his affianced bride! How warm and pure were her feelings! How deep seated and true the affec-

tion she had inspired in this her girlhood's home!

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" he inly murmured, "would that we might never quit this seclusion!"

It was a lover's thought, a lover's aspiration! natural, but evanescent, virtually annulled in the moment of its utterance; and again his heart beat high with pride at the idea of one day presenting her to an admiring world as his own.

"How proudly," he thought, "would she be welcomed at dear old Oatlands! How tenderly by Herbert Malgrove!—by Constance!"

Yes, these home affections were dearer to his heart than the homage of a hollow world.

It is so natural to embody our ideas of the Good and Beautiful in the form of the worshipped one, that Lord Castleton may be pardoned his lover-like egotism. Long, too, that night he gazed from his casement in the direction of the château. The giant trees completely overshadowed all but the tall towers; no matter, amid those clustering trees reposed, in her young innocence, his heart's idol, and he could not withdraw his gaze.

It was a night meet for the encouragement of lovers' dreams, and Castleton *was* a lover; and, being one, formed no exception to the rule which

enrols that special species of lunatic on the staff of dreamers.

The friends with whom Mdle. de Malcé had been staying when summoned to her father's sick couch, arrived a few days after her return to La Garde, to pass the interval previous to commencing their projected tour with her.

The Marchioness St. Marée and the late Countess de Malcé had been intimates from childhood.

Both were English, both had married French nobles of the Protestant faith. At least, the somewhat lax notions entertained by the marquis had quickly subsided into that creed under the influence of a wife whom he ardently loved.

Peacefully now glided on the days of the youthful heiress. Hope, the charmer, smiled, and was once more tremblingly welcomed to the breast from which it had so lately been deemed a banished guest for ever. Leaning on the arm of her lover-guardian, she wandered amid the enchanting scenes of her Norman home, nor sighed, nor would have sought for fairer lands.

Breaking in upon their blissful dream, however, Florence's guests reminded them that the season was already pretty far advanced; and, at last, the travelling carriages, with all the paraphernalia attendant upon a departure, ap-

peared. On a fine bright morning Florence bade a tearful farewell to her girlhood's home.

"Soon, very soon, dear faithful friends, will I return to you," she exclaimed, holding out both little hands to servitors and tenants, as each pressed forward, eager to catch the last glimpse of her face.

It was a scene Castleton never forgot, though, alas! it was fated to be remembered amid one of a far different nature. Now, however, no cloud gave token of future ill; really and metaphorically the path seemed strewn with flowers.

It is not our intention to trace the course of the travellers step by step through the picturesque provinces of France; suffice it that, after lingering awhile among her sunniest spots, and gazing with mingled awe and delight upon those "palaces of Nature," as Byron, with his usual felicity of expression, styles the Alps, they halted one bright evening at the pretty little Hôtel des Montagnes, in the Piedmontese territory, and here we will leave them while we pay a brief visit to the unforgotten clime of our birth, brave old England.

CHAPTER XV.

It is no dream, and I am desolate.—BYRON.

FROM the seclusion of Château la Garde no voice went forth to whisper to the trembling heart of Constance Greville the tale of Lord Castleton's devotion to another. In the retirement of her own home, whether at Beechgrove or in town—for she was almost as much a recluse in the one as in the other—no tidings for several months proclaimed the nuptial engagement between the friend of her girlhood and the beautiful heiress; but, though hope was slowly dying out in her breast—if one so delicate and reserved could ever be said to have entertained any in a matter where no definite avowal of love had warranted it—yet interest in, and for, Lord Castleton still absorbed her mind to a degree that closed the doors on all minor sympathies.

If she thought of Herbert Malgrove at all at this time it was rather as the beloved friend of Castleton than with any distinct personal interest in him as bearing upon herself. In common with all who knew him, she regarded him as the most exalted of human beings. But it

was with a kind of abstract worship that she so regarded him ; it lacked the warmth, the soul-stirring warmth, that characterized her every feeling towards Castleton. Had she been required to decide between him and his friend in a question of their relative merits, it is certain that she had declared in favour of Malgrove ; but the very errors of some men have a wild fascination in them, which not the sublimest virtues in another can win to tenderness. Perhaps, too, her interest in Lord Castleton had acquired additional strength from her uncertainty as to the actual degree of estimation in which he held her, and the consequent necessity on her part for its concealment. Of Herbert at this period Constance, from the kindest of motives, saw but little. It was impossible, with one of so transparent a nature as his, that she could be wholly unconscious of his devotion ; and, too noble for a shade of coquetry to find place in her disposition, she withdrew, so far as she could venture upon without giving him pain, from the companionship of old.

Meanwhile, Herbert with a heart lightened of at least one half its weight of care, for he no longer felt, as he had often done before, a traitor to the best and most generous of friends, pursued the even tenor of his life, showering down blessings upon all within his sphere ; no

niggard he of his own means any more than of the overflowing coffers of the Lord of Oatlands, to whom he wrote constantly. Meantime, rumours were rife respecting him;—who can muffle the alarum of the popular voice?

The Earl of Castleton stood on too lofty a pedestal, and was held in far too high esteem by an admiring world not to have made enemies: “He must have bowed as low to knaves and cowards as to honest men who is without them,” says Sir Oliver Surface. Yes, rumours began, at length, to float about the precincts of St. James’s—rumours of all kinds and colours; some, and not a few, came barbed by malice.

At one time, “In a beautiful villa, on the Leman Lake, his lordship was ‘sighing like a furnace,’ at the feet of an Italian cantatrice;” at another “he was held ‘in durance’ by an enchantress, before the effulgence of whose charms Armida’s self had paled.” Then he was “steeped to the chin in the dissipations of the French capital.”

Other bulletins, however, of his lordship’s moral health credited him with at least an honourable attachment to an interesting but penniless orphan (penniless orphans are by special contract invariably interesting) whom he

had rescued from a state of destitution amid the slums of Paris.

The last, and it was the least disreputable, endowed a high-born lady with fabulous wealth and with a no less fabulous allotment of lovers, from whom he had carried her off *vi et armis*.

This, though wide of the mark, was the nearest approach to the truth, and this was the rumour that at length won its way to the boudoir at Beechgrove. Reports of a questionable character were little likely to be breathed into the ear of a pure-minded woman such as Lady Constance. And how received that lady the report, so rife she was told in the higher circles? Well, to all outward seeming, with little or no emotion, but perhaps the walls, if walls have voices, of her own chamber might have made other revelations;—they had told of sighs smothered on her pillow in the hush of night, of bitter tears shed over the destruction of as sweet a dream as ever lapt a young, pure soul in Elysium. Enough! let no prying eye penetrate the curtained mystery—for sorely did Constance take herself to task for her worse than folly, her unmaidenly (as she termed it) because unsought love, and resolve upon its immediate renunciation. It sufficed—Stratford Castleton loved another; of that, at least, there

could not be a doubt, and she must divorce herself from every thought of him.

In vain ! in vain ! The dream of half a lifetime is not to be uprooted by the "Je le veux" of any mere mortal ; the third Bourbon laid claim to divinity we believe, any way his dictum or his veto alike met instant and servile obedience ; but Lady Constance was not Louis Quatorze—she was simply a high-hearted, loving woman, and all that such an one might do to shake off the delusion which had held her senses in captivity she did do. Dashing the tear from her eye, and choking down the rising sob that half-frightened her sense of propriety, she went forth into the world, and none but, haply, Herbert Malgrove divined that the smile her lip put on was but a soft disguise to veil a very aching heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

In Italy the memory sees more than the eye. Scarcely a stone is turned up that has not some historic association, ancient or modern, that may not be said to have gold under it.—ROGERS.—*Notes to Italy.*

OUR travellers were slowly wending their way down the steep declivity which brings you direct to the Milanese territory, when the mar-

quis was accosted by a gentleman on horseback; young, and an Englishman. "I cannot I think be mistaken in the Marquis St. Marée."

"My dear Bathurst, is it possible! I am really very glad to see you. Are you journeying alone, a tourist like ourselves, 'Syntax in search of the picturesque?' Allow me the pleasure—the Earl of Castleton—Mr. Charles Bathurst, a very good fellow as times go, yet not quite so innocent as he looks to be."

"And her ladyship, is she not with you?" inquired the youth.

"Yes, she is only a few yards in advance, she will be delighted to greet her old playmate."

"And I, enchanted to renew my acquaintance with her ladyship."

In a recent visit of the marquis and his lady to England, Charles Bathurst had met them at his uncle's country house, and he and Madame St. Marée had become fast friends. She found in the good-humoured, daring school-boy, for he was then but little more, a congenial spirit, mirthful and mischievous enough for any amount of folly, and folly or frolic she dearly loved. Bathurst required little persuasion to induce him to join their party; he had, he said, left his Nestor, Mr. Russell, on the other side the Alps, the sudden demise of his mother having occasioned his recall to England. "But I am

surely old enough to be out of leading-strings," he subjoined, drawing himself up to his full altitude.

"I should think so," said her ladyship, with one of her archest smiles, "you must have left Eton."

When all but the marquis had retired for the night, the youth stopped his lordship as he too was leaving the room.

"Tell me, my dear sir, I beseech you, who is that exquisite creature?"

"I beg your pardon, what exquisite creature, Charles?"

"My dear sir! how can you ask, the lady who is travelling with you?"

"What, my wife?"

"No, no; the lady who just left the room with the marchioness?"

"Oh! Madame St. Géran, she is the widow of——"

"Absurd! As if I could mean the old lady."

"Ah—I apprehend;—well—she is a—young lady, Charles."

"Thank you, my lord, my own discrimination led me to a like conclusion, or if I wavered it was in favour of her being an angel."

"No, Charles, no, happily she is mortal, and

the sole surviving branch of the ancient and honourable house of the De Malcés."

"And the gentleman who rode by her carriage, and appeared so devoted to her is—the Earl of Castleton, I think you said?"

"The Earl of Castleton."

"And will, I conjecture," persisted the youth, "eventually become——"

"Precisely," yawned the marquis, "you evince very creditable powers of discernment—for your age, as her ladyship would have said. Good-night, my dear boy, I perceive you are sleepy. It is cruel to keep you from your bed."

A very short time sufficed to place Charles Bathurst, who was naturally of a frank and cheery disposition, upon terms of easy familiarity with all parties. At first he seemed to stand a little in awe of Lord Castleton, his superiority was so marked that it in some measure suppressed the full flow of his boyish spirits, for he was barely nineteen, but as all the splendour of that lofty and generous nature became more fully revealed to him, the feeling gave place to the most enthusiastic affection and respect, while the emotion with which he gazed upon the rare loveliness of Florence de Malcé threatened sad havoc around the region of his

heart, and there was none to warn, for none suspected his danger.

Perhaps no city has been subjected to greater diversity of opinions than Milan, and perhaps, as in those hazarded upon the varied hues of the chameleon, "all are," within a certain limitation, "right, and all are wrong." Assuredly there are two sides to the medal, but with a host of imperfections on its head Milan is a singularly attractive city, so, at least, must the élite of the Italian fashionable world have thought, for while the banks of the "deep-dyed Brenta," and the marble palaces of fairer Venice were deserted, the Corso of Milan was thronged with the gay and titled, and though the long black veil peculiar to the Milanese shades many a fair cheek, not a few killing glances are shot from beneath its folds, piquing the curiosity, if failing to subjugate the hearts, of the gazers.

As the carriage to convey them to the Corso dashed up to the hotel, Castleton turning to Florence, who was still in her morning dress, exclaimed, "My love, we are waiting for you!"

"Ah, do not ask me, Stratford," she returned, timidly stealing to his side; "not two months in his grave."

"My darling!—my precious one! it is enough, we will stay at home together;" but distressed at the thought of casting a gloom over the

spirits of such devoted friends, she succeeded in dissuading her guardian from remaining.

The memory of him who had out of the depths of his affection for her planned this tour, so often recalled the sorrowing past that present enjoyment in the orphan's case was hardly to be expected. If the most devoted love could have beguiled her into oblivion of her grief, it was hers in measureless abundance, and her tearful eyes bore frequent testimony to her grateful sense of this affectionate and ceaseless solicitude, but we may not always control the heart's anguish.

A child's love for a father, her lament for the loss of that father, are sacred things ; and if Castleton sorrowed over her sorrow, he revered its cause ; not for the mines of Peru would he have seen it too hastily banished, while he loved her only the more tenderly for it.

Every interesting variety in the scenery he pointed out to her observation, not a feature in nature or art (and his was a mind keenly alive to the charms in both) escaped him ; but that which more than all the varied beauties of the landscape, the marble wonders, and pictorial gems enshrined within the cities they visited, tended to restore the equanimity of the generous girl's spirits, was the impression that she was not justified in marring all sense of enjoyment in

others by the display of feelings in which she so well knew all so warmly sympathized.

One fertile source of happiness was within her reach, and inclination went hand in hand with the power to indulge it. Of a tender and compassionate nature, nothing so much gratified her as the relief of the weary wayfarer they so continually encountered. Sometimes, more than usually interested, she would, under the smiling rapture of Castleton's eye, administer more substantial aid than mere passing alms. Happy girl! even with thy woof of sorrow! Often, as she leaned upon his arm, with the tear of generous sympathy trembling in her eye, she would innocently inquire if in the world, to which she was yet a stranger, there were a bliss that could compare with this.

And could Castleton deceive her? He knew how vapid and how fleeting were all the joys it could offer in its stead. He knew that when most intoxicated by its homage and dazzled by its splendour, the heart would, still distrusting, ask "if this be joy." But Florence distrusted nothing, she only sighed at the thought that she should so soon exchange her present happy social life for a world where fashion held eternal empire.

Yes; Florence sighed that she should so soon mix with that gay world, her exclusion

from which she would perchance have deemed her heaviest punishment.

It is a strange caprice of our nature, but that which is within our reach we rarely set a value upon, yet, were it withheld, we should too probably mourn its deprivation.

The marquis, who began to entertain the strongest sentiments of regard for Lord Castleton, deeply lamented, since the guardianship of the young heiress had devolved upon him, that so long a period must elapse before he could claim her hand in marriage. While she remained in retirement at La Garde, or travelled in company with the immediate friends of her late father, little was to be apprehended. It was in the world, amidst every luxury at the command of wealth, surrounded not alone by the gay, the titled, and the dissipated, but by the more insidious, that her real danger was to be calculated upon.

From the avowedly wicked the pure mind of the novice would at once recoil, but would she, with her limited experience, *could* she be proof against the specious allurements of the designing, who with the cant of decorum upon their lips are a thousand times more mischievous? That the world would enchant her was scarcely matter of question, that it would deceive her was no less certain; and who was to be her guide

through this motley masquerade yclept the "world," which she was about to enter blindfold? Not the Earl of Castleton—so young a man, though ten times her guardian, could scarcely be about her person from dawn till midnight.

Her guardian then, her real *bonâ fide* guardian, was the fond, faithful, simple-hearted creature, who knew about as much of this mundane sphere of ours as the novice committed to her care.

No one could deny to this gentle lady the possession of the most engaging qualities; that loving loyal heart of hers were alone worth a host of brilliant accomplishments, but independently of her great age, and it was a material drawback, she was in all essential points utterly disqualified for the task of ushering into the world a young girl, who to all the captivation of exterior grace, joined the attractive but dangerous gift of a warm and susceptible heart, with the superaddition of unlimited control over wealth, which to one so new to its possession would appear exhaustless.

The Earl of Castleton, it was true, might, to no inconsiderable extent, ward off any apprehended danger by zealous watch and chary counsel, but he was at best but a youthful counsellor, and decorum could scarcely sanction his interference on many points, while on some few

he could scarcely exercise any at all. Clearly nothing of this kind had occurred to the mind of the late count, and nothing now could or ought to be done to set aside the arrangements he had made in all love to his child, and in the fullest confidence in the man whom he had appointed her guardian, and whom he subsequently received, and so warmly welcomed, as her future husband.

Perhaps the greatest mistake, under the circumstances, made by the count, was to be found in the delay of the marriage until his daughter should have attained the age of twenty, and at her father's decease she was little more than eighteen.

That at eighteen or even nineteen a girl is too young to anchor her barque in the port of matrimony may be true, but with Malthus and all his disciples in arms against us, we contend that unprotected orphanage is a worse evil than wedlock.

"A visit to the Brera is, I hear, in contemplation for this morning," said her ladyship, addressing the fair Florence; "I will be your chaperone, my love, since Mamma St. Géran, with wiser prescience than I display, eschews the thing she cannot understand."

"You cannot understand painting! my dear Madame St. Marée!"

"Indeed, no ! Quere, Could I distinguish between a Rafaele and a Rembrandt ?"

"Your ladyship cannot mean to imply that you trace no distinctive features between the Italian and the Dutch schools ?"

"Grieved to shock you, my lord, but even unto such a slough of dulness does mine extend."

"Pardon me, the grace, the majesty, the harmony of the Italian masters are never to be mistaken."

"Ah ! there it is—grace ! majesty ! harmony ! Now be it known unto you, most accomplished critic, that I have a loose random habit of classing all these distinctions under the general name of cant. Light and shade—chiaro-oscuro, is I believe the term—breadth and tone, perplex me to a degree, but I can admire beautiful pictures in spite of my ignorance, and even find my advantage in it too, for I am often delighted with that from which nicer judges turn away ; I should have enchanted Laurence Sterne."

"Why Laurence Sterne ?" inquired Florence.

"Because I am so easily satisfied. He declared he 'would walk fifty miles barefoot to shake the honest hand of that man who was pleased, he knew not why, and cared not wherefore.' Now I am charmed, I know not why, and I am sure I care not wherefore."

"Laurence Sterne is not the only one your ladyship would have enchanted," said Castleton; "it is said of our English Apelles—

"When they talked of their Rafaelles, Correggios, and stuff, He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff."

"Well, Sir Joshua treated them as they deserved. Pretenders to connoisseurship in art are the most insufferable bores."

"In short your ladyship subscribes to Sterne's opinion, 'that of all the species of cant in this canting world, though the cant of hypocrisy may be the worst, yet the cant of criticism is assuredly the most tormenting.'"

But here they halted before one of the world's great master-pieces, the "Mater Dolorosa" of Carlo Dolce, and perhaps the silence of the whole party, a silence of many minutes, was the most flattering criticism it could receive. Notwithstanding the general impression that Milan was very charming, all were more or less anxious to reach Venice. The "Sea-Cybele" had been so long associated in the ardent imagination of Florence with poetry and romance, that she was advised to return and "leave Yarrow unvisited."

"It will not come within a league of your expectations," said one.

"Depend upon it your 'Rome of the Ocean' will disenchant you," chimed in another.

"Can Venice, the 'city of the soul,' sink below *any* ideas that may be formed of her?" pleaded she.

"Rather ask if any city reared by mortal hands can realize the glowing picture of your imagination?"

"Nous verrons," returned the laughing girl; and so after a drive to Pavia, where fell, "Sans peur et sans reproche," the gallant Bayard, and where triumphed that crafty fox, Charles V., they bade adieu to stately Milan, her veiled signore, her marble palaces, and her sweet-scented citron and orange groves.

CHAPTER XVII.

A dreadful question is it when we love
To ask if love's return'd.

SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

THAT the rumours afloat respecting the movements of Lord Castleton had winged their flight to the ear of Constance, Herbert knew beyond a doubt; that she was in possession of more reliable information than could be gathered from these rumours he also knew, but true to the innate generosity of his nature, he refrained from addressing her on his own behalf.

If he had not erred in his sometime conjecture

that Constance had regarded her early friend and companion with a more ardent feeling than is wont to characterize the ties of friendship, it argued something beyond bad taste to intrude upon her ear addresses to which, under such circumstances, she must be more than indifferent. That such a step would also be an impolitic one, had not occurred to the straightforward honesty of the man who had never in any one act of his life consulted expedience.

On another point, too, Herbert had evinced a rare simplicity, yet was that simplicity by no means inconsistent with his fine intellect; but he seemed never to have given a thought to the fact of his own position in life, as deficient in the adventitious acquirements of wealth and rank, in contradistinction to Constance so rich in both. The truth was simply this, his mind was cast in too fine a mould for such purely factitious distinctions to weigh a feather's weight with him. If he could have encircled the brows of Constance with a ducal coronet, he had never conceived them ennobled by it, and it was none the less creditable to the lady of his love that on her part no such thought had ever obtruded itself in the form of a barrier between them. It had marred the purity of the picture. If Constance Greville had loved Herbert Malgrove, not the wealth of the Indies, with the loftiest title of

nobility, had weighed a jot in the scale, balanced against the grandeur of a nature she knew to be without its equal.

But did she love him?—Would she ever love him? Alas! this point was all too soon to be tested, though without any premeditation on the part of Herbert. More than four months had now elapsed since the engagement of Lord Castleton to Mdlle. de Malcé, and Constance had returned to Beechgrove, after an unusually long stay at her villa at Reigate.

Ah! had Herbert but known that that prolonged stay, so far from Oatlands, had been in lovingkindness, in pity to *him*! But he did *not* know this, and so—he hurried on to his fate. As was his wont after any absence of Constance, he went to see her; for their brief meeting on her arrival the day before had been hurried and unsatisfactory, colder and more restrained, it had pained him to think, for she had ever distinguished him by the most affectionate friendship.

As he entered the morning-room, for they were too truly friends for any mere forms between them, he saw her leaning against the glass-door of the conservatory, her face was turned from him, but at the sound of his voice she looked hastily up, and Herbert saw that she was pale, and in tears.

Thrown off his guard at sight of her distress, he eagerly advanced.

"Constance! dear Constance! in tears!"

"'Tis nothing," she returned, wiping them away. "I was thinking over old times, and their memory will sometimes pale the cheek and dim the eye, Herbert, but," and she forced a smile, "is it so rare a thing to see a woman weep that you look so saddened? 'Tis said, you know, that she can shed tears when she lists."

"I know not that, but God grant yours may be ever as quickly chased by smiles as now. There are some griefs, Constance, which so scathe the heart that they leave no room for smiles, but it is surely not here we would look for such harsh sorrow; if happiness inhabit not so fair a temple, where may we hope to find it?"

It was very painful to look upon the smile that writhed the lip of Constance as she unconsciously echoed the word "happiness;" a tear had been a far less mournful interpreter of grief than that smile—a very mockery of joy—but she conquered her emotion, and presently turned her companion's attention to her flowers. "See how beautiful my plants are looking, they are of my own rearing too, Herbert, yet you do not praise my skill in horticulture."

"Perhaps," he returned, fixing his melancholy

gaze upon her sweet face, "I was thinking more of your skill in matters of other and far dearer import."

"As how?" said she, but more timidly than inquiringly, for her heart foreboded what was to follow.

At first a hard-breathed sigh alone replied to her. "Oh perilous venture of those who love one object with the whole heart!"

"Constance!" at last broke from his pale lips, "I can no longer endure this torturing suspense. The time is past for further disguise. It cannot be but you have read my heart—its hopes, its wishes, and alas! its apprehensions. Need I, indeed, tell you, how long, how dearly, and it may be how hopelessly I have loved you! Speak! I conjure you speak! Tell me I am not utterly despised."

Very slowly, and to all appearance calmly, Constance raised her eyes as Herbert ceased this passionate appeal. There was no surprise visible in her countenance, no confusion, but its expression of deep dejection rivetted Herbert's gaze, and struck coldly upon his heart.

"Malgrove! *dear* Malgrove," and there was a tremulous tenderness in her low sweet voice, "I had so hoped, so prayed this trial might have been spared us. God knows how earnestly I have sought to avoid it, for I will not affect to have

misunderstood you ; I did know, full ' quickly they say comes such knowledge,' that you were wasting the treasure of your love upon one who could make no adequate return for a gift so precious. Forgive me, Herbert !" she went on, yet more gently, more tenderly, seeing the unutterable anguish depicted in his countenance, " I wound your feelings, and rive my own. Oh, believe me ! believe me ! I would very fain have been silent, but this may not be now, I dare not deceive you. If the most affectionate regard ; if veneration, the deepest, truest, tenderest—"

She paused ; whither were her yearning impulses leading her ?

" I dare not say more ;—yet, oh, dear and noble Herbert ! before we part, let me thank you, how fervently, words may never tell, for all your generous love, your"—

" Cease, dearest lady."

" Oh, call me Constance !"

" Dear, dearest Constance ! to me you owe nothing but the bitter pain, I well know, this rejection costs you. For myself, I have so long despaired that sorrow will be no new guest. Nay, do not weep, I should have spared you this pang, should have known, have felt that friendship was not love ; yet hope, Constance, is the child of error. Grant me only your pardon, dear one."

"Ah, rather bid me ask that of you, Malgrove," mournfully she looked into his face as the tears fell thick and fast from her eyes. She held out her hand,—passionately he pressed it to his lips and to his heart.

She rose, as if she dared not trust herself to prolong an interview so fraught with pain to each.

"It will be the last, Constance, the very last. I shall not again disturb you by my presence, never again draw forth the tear of sympathy, which yet I thank you for. Hereafter, it will be my sweetest consolation. God bless you, beloved one. May heaven, in mercy, shower down its choicest blessings on you—for who may so well deserve them? My fervent, heartfelt prayers shall be offered up for your happiness, for yours, and, and"—his voice faltered, the colour deepened on his cheek—"for those most dear to you."

Could Constance misinterpret the meaning of this insinuation, even if Herbert's emotion had not betrayed him? There was not the faintest gleam of coquetry in her disposition, and had there been, was Malgrove, the good and noble Malgrove, a being on whom to exercise it? She must, indeed, have been light of heart and brain, who could have added a single pang to the

already overflowing cup of one so utterly bowed down.

"I understand you," said she, looking strangely unembarrassed, impressed as she was with her generous purpose to rob her rejection of her lover's suit of its sharpest sting; "but you are mistaken; if it will afford you any solace, carry with you the assurance that the hand I have denied to the virtues of Herbert Malgrove shall *never* be given to another. And now farewell."

But Herbert still retained her hand in so firm a clasp that she was unable to withdraw it, and yet he seemed to hold it in an unconscious clasp. With this declaration of Constance, the truth, the painful truth, impressed itself upon his mind. His doubts, his fears, which he had since Castleton's engagement given to the winds, were once more revived.

Her love, her unrequited love, for his friend was now, he thought, placed beyond a question, and accounted for the assurance she had just given him, never to bestow her hand in marriage.

Whether Constance was at the moment sensible of this, whether she divined that she had inadvertently betrayed herself by this avowal, is uncertain; but, after a brief pause, she again looked up, and encountering the fixed but tender gaze of Herbert, dropped her eyes, while the blush that dyed her cheek revealed a tale, her

pride and modesty had she believed hitherto concealed. She might have addressed to Malgrove the words of Ellen Douglas to the Knight of Snowdown,

"Thou hast the secret of my heart ;
Forgive, be generous, and depart ;"

for in her inmost soul she felt that hers lay bared before him.

It was the first time Constance had ever bowed her head from a sense of conscious shame in the presence of mortal man, and even now her native dignity was quickly resumed ; but Malgrove had traced enough in her emotion, enough in that trembling frame, that downcast eye, and burning cheek, to confirm the impression of her affection for his friend, and a feeling of deep commiseration for the beautiful and high-minded girl instantly stifled every selfish consideration in his breast. An intuitive sense of delicacy forbade his lingering another minute in her presence.

Pressing the cold hand he still mechanically held to his lips, but without the utterance of a word, or even raising his eyes to her face, he quitted the room.

And it was well for Herbert Malgrove that he looked to a brighter and a purer world for solace, for he felt that all of what men call happiness

was over for him in this ; that to him, existence
must henceforth be

“ A lifeless and a tideless sea,
A desert—to Eternity.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

There is a glorious city in the sea,
The sea is in the broad, the narrow streets,
Ebbing and flowing.—ROGERS' *Italy*.

SUN never shone out on fairer day than that
which welcomed our travellers to Venice, and
never sun shone on fairer city than she of the
“ hundred isles.” Queenly in her decay, majes-
tic in her fall, a halo of glory yet hangs round
her, reluctant, it would seem, to quit so fair a
tenement.

“ As oft at eve remains a blushing ray,
That parting tells how glorious was the day.”

Yes ; time and devastation, plunder and oppres-
sion, have written strange defeature on the face
of this once proud city. No longer is her inde-
pendence a boast. Her social and political
strength is exhausted, her palaces are crum-
bling into dust, and pomp and revelry and
song no longer hold high festival within her

walls. Yet *he* who has best hymned her praise pronounced her

“Even dearer in her day of woe,
Than when she was a boast, a marvel, and a show.”

And then how sweetly over the waste of memory rise her unforgotten names of glory.

Did we say sweetly? yet think on Tasso. As the mind wanders ages back, Torquato's injured shade glides past; yet hold! not o'er Venice hangs the curse of an offended spirit; Ferrara's gloomy dungeon enclosed the captive poet, and the decay of that once festive city, her lonely Halls, deserted streets, and vacant throne, would half persuade us that the House of Este was now reaping the due reward of that cold policy which doomed Italia's sweetest poet to life-long imprisonment.

So inseparably is the memory of Tasso interwoven with the desolation of Ferrara's walls that the saddest sympathies of man's nature are called forth at sight of them. But the song of the Gondolieri, for they do sometimes sing, though their strain is evermore a mournful one, reminds us that we are in Venice; Venice, so unique in its character, so distinct from every other spot in Italy, nay, in the world's wide range. Genoa has her marble palaces, but they are unlike those of Venice; Milan, her un-

rivalled cathedral, but the Temple of St. Mark, motley and murky though it be, is worlds more interesting. Florence has her Casino, Naples her Chiaja, Rome her Corso, but each and all are different, essentially different and distinct, from the Piazza di San Marco of the sea-girt city. And where is the blue Adriatic? where her rich-trimmed galleys, her dark, gliding, coffin-like gondolas? where the "Rialto," and the thousand poetic associations that single name calls up? The "Jew," the "Merchant," and the "lady of Belmont," with the Enchanter who conceived the wondrous tale, are all before us as we glide through its bold elliptic arch.

No, there is nothing on earth like Venice, though, by-the-way, rising "with her tiara of proud towers" from out the bosom of the waters, she looks not of earth, but rather like some fairy realm called into being by the wave of a magician's wand.

The approach to this fair city, whether from the continent or the sea, is inconceivably fascinating, and vividly as Florence had coloured the scene with the hues of her many-tinted fancy, it more than realized them.

Not a few exclamations of delight burst from the lips of Bathurst, who, like Florence, beheld the "Sea-Cybele" for the first time. On one side, far as the eye can reach, is a long vista of

marble palaces rising from out the deep, for no barrier whatever intervenes between it and the weed-clad walls. On the other, frowning in awful majesty, the Palace of the Doges.

At the end of the Piazzetta stand the two noble pillars of oriental granite, one surmounted by the winged lion of St. Mark, the standard of this once haughty republic, the other by the statue of St. Theodore, the patron saint of Venice.

The suite of rooms engaged at the Hotel Rienzi, had the double merit (not always to be secured) of being commodious as well as elegant. The noble hall, with its delicate tracery of mosaic; the spacious staircase, with its array of classic statuary, intermingled with the choicest exotics; the lofty saloons, with their superb lustres and mirrors of purest crystal, were each in turn admired, but that which more than all captivated them was the scene, so novel and so striking, opening to view from the marble balcony, on the marble terrace, upheld, as it should seem, upon the summit of the waves, from which terrace you descend at once by marble steps into your gondola.

Everything was of marble, even to the far-famed and graceful "Rialto," with its single elliptic arch, flung with such graceful carelessness across the Grand Canal.

The canal, however, was not of marble, and Florence, not alone, we may be sure, stood watching the gondolas as with the speed of lightning they shot through its broad span, shadowing, though but for a moment, the glittering surface of the waters.

In the midst of a glowing description of the immortal "Steeds of Lysippus," the marquis summoned them to dine.

"Oh, never mind dinner now," exclaimed the young lady, hastily, fastening the strings of her hat.

"Never mind dinner! vive Dieu! this to a half-famished, travel-wearied man! Do you take me for a chameleon, to whom air alone suffices, or a romantic demoiselle who is content to feed on moonshine? Here's Castleton, too, in the clouds."

"False assumption, I assure you; at all events, I am quite ready to descend in quest of more substantial fare than I am likely to meet with there."

"Stratford! when I am dying to see St. Mark's, and the Ducal Palace, and the 'Bridge of Sighs,' and it will be so soon dark."

"It is never dark beneath an Italian sky," said the marquis; "besides, the moon will be up."

“ And,” whispered Castleton,

“ ‘If thou wouldst view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight.’ ”

“ Behold,” exclaimed the marquis, as the covers were removed, “the capo d’opera of the first artiste in Venice. Ainsi cuit on aurait mangé son père. Oh, Cambacères was a man of consummate taste and judgment ! C’est un mortel divin qu’un cuisinier.”

And Florence did see St. Mark’s, and the Palace of the Doges, and the Ponte “dei Sospiri ;” saw them, too, by moonlight ; but the myriads of artificial lights that glared from the cafés and casinos marred the sentiment of the scene.

Every one knows that the Piazza di San Marco is the rendezvous of the élite of Venice, though the distinctions of rank, like all here, are fast disappearing. Men of all climes (for three-fourths of the population of Venice consist of foreigners) assemble here on a fine evening to chat, to smoke, to eat ices, sip coffee and sherbet, play chess, billiards, cards, dominoes ; sing, laugh, improvise ; in fine, it would be difficult to say what they do not do, for all kinds of exhibitions and diversions, from gorgeous tragedy down to the buffooneries of Policinello go forward ; but so far as the Venetians themselves

are concerned, all appears to be the result of habit alone, for the spirit that formerly gave animation to the scene has fled. A faint and expiring effort to image what the past *has* been is alone discernible. But let us now venture to judge what Venice *was* by that which she has become.

It is not alone her Palladian palaces, her lofty temples, or her splendid basilicas that are falling to decay, the work of human devastation speeds yet more rapidly.

Rarely, indeed, does the eye now rest upon the stately form and noble countenance of erst the characteristics of the haughty Venetian: in the place of these is to be seen a grave, often a sorrowing aspect. A painful consciousness of wrong, of insult, and, above all, of deep humiliation may be traced, and little marvel; other rulers dwell in their land, the stranger's foot now treads her marble halls, the voice of the conqueror (alas, that Venice should ever have been conquered!) rings in the ear, and falls heavily upon the crushed spirit of her sons.

Long, like some stately edifice, an ark upon the waters, she stood unscathed by the storms that shook to their foundations mightier nations; at length she, too, fell, the last, the fairest, and oh, shame to her rulers! shame to the name of Venice! fell without an effort to

save herself! Voluntarily, abjectly, signed away her thirteen hundred years of independence, and self-deposed, on bended knee tendered the terms of her abdication to the proud conqueror.

Yes, tamely, albeit with breaking heart, looked on to see the plunderer bear away her richest treasures, even those of which she had herself despoiled another empire. It was not thus Sarmatia fell; it was not thus that she succumbed when the iron car of oppression was driven over each fair and fertile field of that doomed land; when her name, her very name, with a refinement of barbarity that had shamed the darkest ages, was blotted out from the map of nations; when scarce an arm was uplifted to aid her; when even England, ever till now the friend of the oppressed, hung back, *she* struggled on, fiercely, desperately fought, till freedom and Kosciusko together sunk upon the battle plain.

“Oh, bloodiest picture in the book of time!
Sarmatia fell, unwept, without a crime!”

Yes, Poland's sun has set, but it has set in glory; and though her heritage be the chain, her home, the home of the exile, it will be long before her unavenged wrongs or the gallantry of her sons will be forgotten.

But while we, perchance, have been wearying

our readers, pouring forth a bootless lament on fallen nations, our travellers, whom we left in the square of St. Mark's, may have been taking the ague. If instead of a square under an Italian sky, it had been canopied by an English one, small chance had there been of escape. An English coup-de-vent is almost as mischievous as a southern coup-de-soleil.

Attracted by the novelty of the scene, it was late before the gentlemen returned, and even long after, the soft air and cloudless sky lured them on the terrace, from whence they looked on such a scene as Italy, or rather Venice alone could mirror forth. The moon had risen in matchless splendour, and with her starry train shed a flood of light above, around, beneath, silvering the tops of tower and tree, of spire and wave, and bringing into broad and beautiful relief the lofty domes and minarets, the graceful colonnades and arched porticoes.

The sparkling tide reflecting her rays was ever and anon darkened by the deep shadow of the gondola as it skimmed over its surface with the grace and swiftness of a bird, scarcely rippling the waters by the oar's light plash. Now a gay strain of music floated upon the ambient air, anon the note was changed, and a soft, flute-like voice accompanied a guitar, pouring forth a gush of such enchanting melody that

the listener's senses seemed losing themselves in dreams Elysian.

Suddenly the voice of the minstrel ceased, but the air was continued in the same plaintive key. Once more it changes to a joyous note, and the spell is broken.

And now in quick succession passed to their homes the gay loiterers of St. Mark's. Some, and by far the greater number, in gondolas. The proud Austrian with curled lip and flashing eye, erect and firm of foot as conscious that he trod on conquered ground, *himself* the conqueror. The turbaned and luxurious Turk, yet inhaling the aroma of his meerschaum, and leaning perchance,—oh, strange contact of adverse spirits!—on the arm of the vanquished Greek, in the splendid costume of his country, not looking quite so fierce as of erst the Macedonian conqueror, but with something of that high and chivalrous bearing which not all of wrong, of insult and oppression have quite sufficed to extinguish.

Then passed on another, and another; the wealthy Jew, his keen eye bent with calculating shrewdness upon the languid countenance of the haughty and but half-humbled Venetian, and trafficking even at that hour, and returning from such a scene, for the last frail remnant of his companion's worldly possessions, yon stately

palace shadowed by waving branches of the cypress; the heritage of his forefathers, the home of his boyhood.

At last the hum of man ceased. Not a sound save the plash of a far-distant oar, the rippling of the water, or the murmur of their own voices was to be heard, even these were at length stilled. Every one felt the influence of the tranquil hour, nor for a while cared to disturb it by a breath.

A prolonged heigh-ho ! followed by a half-sad, half-mirthful laugh, broke the sort of enchantment in which their senses were lulled, and they separated, Florence murmuring as she raised her dewy eyes to cast a last lingering look at the star-begemmed canopy, the waters that mirrored it, and the shadowy outline of palace, grove and fane,

“ Most glorious Night,
Thou wert not sent for slumber !”

* * * *

Another delightful week on the banks of the Brenta, and preparations for departure began to be talked of.

“ As if any spot on the world's wide region can compare with Venice !” exclaimed Bathurst.

“ And yet you can fly these enchantments !”

subjoined Florence, looking pleadingly into the face of the marquis.

"Indeed can I, May-blossom, with right good-will ; I have failed like you to discover that this 'Queen of the Adriatic,' this 'City of the Soul,' is quite the El Dorado you would persuade me it is. Trust me you may find not a few shadows darkening round the horizon of the sea-goddess if you are so minded."

"Ah, but I am not so minded. Don't, oh! pray don't break the spell."

But, determined that the bliss of ignorance should not be hers, his lordship mercilessly continued—

"Think of the misery of having your ankles manacled till you get the cramp, for walking is out of the question. I maintain that I have scarcely felt my feet since I swam into the place, and I am not amphibious. Oh! to find myself once more ashore, on land fit for a Christian man to bestride, instead of floating about like a river-god, or to give you an image of your bards, like 'a dolphin on a mermaid's back!' Then again the eternal cry of those water-bailiffs, and the coffin-like receptacles into which you are hustled nolens volens. Ah, but I shall hail our hegira with rapture! No smiles less sunny, no laugh less joyous than yours, my bright Hebe,

had reconciled me to so long a stay in this ark of the ocean."

And so a day or two later our little party embarked on the Grand Canal. It was evening, a clear, calm evening. The gentle wave of the trees, the light splash of the measured oar, and a sound of far-distant music alone disturbed the stillness which is a part of Venice, for there is something unearthly, certainly unworldly, in the silence—"the stirring silence" as Rogers calls it, owing to the singularity of its position in the midst of the waters, and the total absence of those sounds so familiar to our ears in all other cities, of the tramp of horses and rush of street vehicles.

Their next halting-place, Ferrara, literally startled them by its spectral desolation. The very genius of Solitude seemed to their fancy to have taken up its abode in the gloomy streets where the rank grass grew wild and weird. Fit retribution for the heartless policy that doomed her brightest spirit to a maniac's cell.

"Alphonso ! how thy ducal pageants shrink
From thee ! if in another station born,
Scarce fit to be the slave of him thou mad'st to mourn."

Yet was it bootless all; "The miserable despot could not quell the insulted mind he sought to quench." Ages yet to come will Torquata's

dungeon, like "Ravenna's hoary shore," and Chillon's mouldering pile, live to our children's children. Dante ! Tasso ! Bonnivard ! the poet and the martyr ! ye are sacred names, hymned too as ye have been by another and yet loftier spirit whose fame no time may obliterate.

A visit to the house still venerated as the abode of the author of the "Orlando," and Ferrara had nothing beyond to interest. The shores of the blue and ever beautiful Mediterranean wooed them to the classic soil of Naples, where, on their arrival, Castleton fell in with his old friend, Frank Vivian, on a tour with his uncle.

At Naples, too, letters from England awaited him ; Malgrove's was opened with all the eagerness of the most devoted friendship.

There was much in it that pleased, somewhat that pained. It was evident that Herbert was but half-reconciled to his protracted stay abroad.

"When," he wrote, "shall I welcome my friend back to his country, and to his paternal home ? Ah, Stratford ! how highly will you estimate the blessings of that dear home when, weary with your wanderings in alien lands, you return once more to its venerable shades, where not a tree, not a stone, but is endeared to you by some fond memorial of the sacred past !

"Return, my friend, return! and in the grateful hearts of your thriving tenantry read a comment upon your own work, and reap the well-earned reward. Then, Stratford, with moistened eye and earnest heart offer up the incense of a thankful spirit to that all-gracious Benefactor who has lent you the means of dispensing so much happiness, and through that happiness showered down His choicest blessings upon you; for you of all men living best can feel that higher joy of the giver over the receiver. With you the power and the will to dispense happiness go hand in hand, and only Heaven can raise you to a bliss beyond this."

Profoundly moved by his friend's earnestness Castleton paused a moment in happy reverie; but the sweets of Mount Hybla had exhausted themselves.

"From my hermitage at Oatlands," the writer went on, "remote alike from the turmoil of Court and Senate, you may conceive how seldom my ears are tingled with intelligence from either, but on my friend's account I do sometimes hazard a 'quid nunc,' and truly, Stratford, I find your reputation, whether as patriot or courtier, at a sufficiently low mark; and wherefore so? Why give your enemies, your political enemies I would imply, grounds for censure?"

"No one better than the son of the late Lord

Castleton can appreciate the character of the true patriot, and if that son is to serve his country, let it be in the way that is best calculated to promote her interests, and reflect the most distinguished credit upon such a father : and can this come out of the indulgence of an indolent repose, beneath the enervating skies of the sunny South ?

“ You will tell me that in the hour of peril you need no other impetus, yet who shall say that this is not a time of peril ?

“ I care not to see your name first in the ranks of political influence, but I would fain see it high in the roll of fair and honourable renown ; first in the file of patriots, first among the stanchest supporters of church and state ; and I would ask my friend if *he* can take rank with such, who passes his days in inglorious ease on a foreign soil, and, as Court scandal will have it, like another Antony at the feet of another Cleopatra.

“ For me, Stratford, I know you ; I know that the very loyalty, and, I may add, sternness of your principles, combined with your chivalrous sense of honour, mainly operates in the present state of party feeling to keep you from the arena of political strife, but I am not equally sure that the wisdom of Solon is herein demonstrated. You have entered upon a public career, in your

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case no undistinguished one, and will you, almost at its onset, desert your colours, and shrink from the *mêlée*, because it is encompassed by dangers and difficulties? Will you suffer taint to rest upon the time-honoured name of Castleton through your passiveness and voluntary expatriation?

"In boyhood your favourite motto was, 'Aut Cæsar, aut nihil.' Shame to the name and race of Castleton if you suffer it to be 'nihil,' but—"

Stratford read no further. Stung to the soul by these reproaches, he burst into vehement refutation of them. *He* pass his days in inglorious ease, *he* desert his colours!

"Unjust, ungenerous Malgrove!"—he paused, shocked at his own words. How dared his lips profane that name by the utterance of such treason! "Unjust! ungenerous! What, Herbert Malgrove!"

He raised the insensible paper from the ground, where in his passion he had flung it, and pressed it to his lips with a burst of remorseful tenderness, as though by that silent but eloquent act he sought to atone for the momentary wrong he had done to the noblest heart that ever beat in friendship's cause.

Seating himself at a writing-table, he began his reply, but the sweet face of his ward presently peeping over his shoulder, it will readily

be believed that even this dear friend was for awhile neglected.

"Stratford, if I interrupt you, I will run away this minute."

"Nay; Herbert will accept so fair an excuse," and Castleton closed the door to prevent the threatened exit.

"But indeed, if you are writing to Mr. Malgrove, nothing can atone for a neglect of him. Now tell me, Stratford," she continued, forgetful of her intended flight, "tell me what is this dear friend really like?"

"Like! what is Herbert like? All that is best and most exalted of our Maker's choicest works."

"Ah, Stratford! then he must resemble—I know who!"

"Devoutly do I pray you do not know the *who* that resembles him."

"Why so?"

"Because I must then despair, for you could not choose but love such a man, and with your whole soul too."

"Et puis?" she archly asked.

"Why then—then bethink you of the fate of the gentle lady wedded to the Moor."

"Why you would never kill me, Stratford?"

The lips that spoke those words trembled even with the smile upon them. Somehow, his

words, all sportive as they were, jarred upon some hidden chord.

"Perchance, my darling, if loving-kindness may kill," and the young betrothed was folded to his bosom, after a very loving fashion.

"But," urged Florence, as she blushing withdrew from that tender embrace, "is Herbert so *very* handsome?"

"Ah! now we have the gist of the inquiry; but first resolve, mine, who is it that resembles my friend?"

"Stratford! as if you did not know!"

"A thousand blessings on my precious one for such sweet flattery; and now to satisfy her curiosity touching the personal endowments of the recluse of Oatlands. Handsome! is he handsome? Well, half the mob of gentlemen that throng the Corso here, the Mall at St. James', or the ball-room at Willis's, are handsome; and yet Herbert Malgrove bears no closer affinity to any one of these, than does the Phidian Jove to Canova's Paris, or Bernini's Narcissus."

"Then he is not handsome, I suppose," and Castleton smiled as she made a little moue.

"Ah, my darling, while memory recalls so much that is dearer and nobler than mere beauty, I cannot content myself with such a term, as applied to him. Statuesque regularity

of outline fades into insignificance before the heaven of intellect."

"But he is at least interesting?" she returned, evidently but half satisfied.

"Interesting! true, that is the cabalistic term with your sex. Well, content you, Herbert is interesting, and if you will promise not to charge him with the faintest perception of effeminacy I will add, beautiful as a poet's dream. But ah, Florence, I must have the large utterance of the early gods, adequately to convey an idea of the exalted greatness of his mind, for it has no anti-type here on earth."

"I think it has," she returned, gliding her little hand with a trusting, yet half shy action, into his.

How radiant was the smile that thanked her. Miss Byron had fainted outright if her hand had borne such an infliction of kisses from that mirror of men, and delight of our great grand-mammas, Sir Charles Grandison.

CHAPTER XIX.

Vedi Napoli e poi more.

ITALIAN PROVERB.

Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all.

SHAKESPEARE.

EVERYWHERE throughout Italy the remains of Roman and Grecian art, mingled with all the sublime and irregular grandeur of nature, lie scattered in melancholy but beautiful profusion, but more than any other city Naples abounds in them.

On an eminence rising gradually from the bosom of the waters of her magnificent bay, stands this fair city, wherein all breathes of enchantment.

A superb house open to the bay was engaged for a few weeks, at an exorbitant price it is true, but then what a world of civility do you get for your money !

In no country on the globe, Greece perhaps excepted, are you so impressed with the charm of manner, of native, inborn grace, as in Italy. That "unbought grace," Burke called it. It belongs to the peasant equally with the high-born.

Nowhere is there so marked a contrast in the

condition between the poor and the rich as in Naples. No city, not even Rome, exhibits such conspicuous examples of abject want among its inhabitants, yet the hungry and half-clad *lazzaroni* are content; they will gaze up into your face with such a reckless, gay, *espiègle* expression in their dark, lustrous eyes, that you are provoked to laughter rather than melted to pity; and throw them but a single *grano*, and their grotesque antics and hilarious mirth fix you in amazement at the force of mere animal spirits that can thus rise above a condition so affecting and so opposed to all our pre-conceived ideas of the misery which extremest indigence may naturally be supposed to entail upon its victims, if indeed we are not moved to a yet keener sense of commiseration for the being who can betray such insensibility to a state which well-nigh levels him with the brute.

Something of this kind Castleton's higher nature felt and expressed.

"Ah!" returned his volatile friend, Frank Vivian, "your notions, my dear Castleton, are always pitched to such a lofty key; your pity for what you term the degradation of these lazy *sybarites* is entirely misplaced. They wouldn't rise above this condition if they could. They won't work, and they can't work; who can with the thermometer at fever heat? It's climate—

all climate, take my word for it, and digestion ; and what governs digestion ? Climate. Look at your London mendicant, the most deplorable, lachrymose under the sun—the fog I mean—if you were not so inured to the sight where would be your appetite for dinner ? but in Naples he is the most jovial, devil-may-care rascal living, and I confess my sympathies go along with him. It would seem that perpetual sunshine without creates one within.”

And young Vivian was scarcely at fault in his estimate. At Naples every breath from the mountain, every gale from the sea, wafts health, and joy, and spirit to the inhabitants.

The condition of the peasantry is certainly superior to that of the lazzaroni, but by no means on a par with the same class in England, or even in many parts of France, and it is bad enough in this last.

They live upon the estates of their respective lords, and, completely vassals, are dependent upon his pride and caprice for their daily subsistence. Yet, amidst it all, the Neapolitan contadina sitting at the porch of her vine-covered hut, is a cheery and a beautiful object to look upon. Her classic features, her untaught elegance, her luminous smile ; and then her children, clinging round their mother's neck, clamouring for their kiss.

Oh, Nature! all-powerful Nature! there is nothing in the artificial scenes of life to compare with thee: and yet we turn from thy soft dominion, and court thy specious foe—cold, joyless art!

“It is little wonder poverty should be in the ascendant in this goodly city,” said Bathurst, addressing the marquis, after the withdrawal of the ladies. “The labouring portions of the community are, I understand, mostly in arrears with their employers for time. They actually raise supplies on their expectancies.”

“What, as a paraphrase of your English aristocracy, Charles?”

The young man coloured slightly.

“I really cannot say whether it is an indigenous or a borrowed practice, but it is surely a most unwise one, to eat up the price of your labour before it is earned.”

“Oh, trust me, Charles, I was not defending the principle; and from whom had you your credentials?”

“Oh, I have learned a great deal since we arrived here, of the external and internal policy of the country; and, by the way, my dear sir, I want to bespeak your interest in behalf of a poor fellow with whom I fell into a gossip this morning in the Strada di Toleda.’ So far as my imperfect knowledge of his language allowed me

to interpret it, he did a piteous tale unfold, one of unparalleled wrong and oppression. I gave him a couple of gold pieces, and lent him a few more, which he is to repay in a week; but I have ventured to promise him more substantial relief in your name, my dear sir."

The marquis elevated his eyebrows, and suppressed an inclination to laugh, as he noted the earnest and almost beseeching expression of the youth.

"And did you make this 'substantial relief' contingent upon the repayment of your loan, Charles? because in that case you may bespeak my liberality to any amount."

"No, oh no! Indeed, I never dreamt of making it a loan at all, but so fervent was the poor fellow's gratitude, so nice his sense of honour, that he absolutely made it a condition, before I could prevail with him to take a single scudi."

Castleton smiled, and held out his hand to the youth, but the marquis laughed outright.

"So, to appease his too sensitive delicacy, you yielded the point?"

Bathurst crimsoned to the roots of his hair.

"And you have really the simplicity to believe the fellow will return your money?"

"I am sure of it, sir. I would stake my existence upon the man's honesty."

"I wouldn't do anything so alarmingly hazardous, Charles. Trust me, you and your gold have parted company for ever. *Ventre saint gris*, but you are indeed a boy!"

"And if age is to teach me mistrust I care not how long I remain one. The sage's wisdom is often ill exchanged for 'the youth's inexperience.'"

Smiling at his tetchiness, the marquis laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Well, well, *mon cher*, when your protégé seeks you in virtue of your promise of more '*substantial relief*' I pledge you my word he shall have any sum his modesty, or your cupidity, may think fit to demand. This, methinks, is outdoing you in liberality."

"Oh, my lord, I perfectly understand the sarcasm; you would insinuate that I am a fool, and the man a knave, and your cash safe in consequence."

"If such inference were less discourteous I would say your critical acumen is not very wide of the mark, Master Charles."

"Well, sir, though this poor fellow's condition might half excuse a fraud, I am nevertheless convinced of his integrity."

"And I of your good nature, my dear boy, so not another word."

"After all," said Castleton, "as honest a

heart may beat beneath a tattered doublet, as the star-decked silken one, and perhaps we do not admire a man the less because he has the generosity to grasp the hand before he scans the sleeve. His lordship would simply counsel a little caution, Bathurst, especially in a foreign land."

"Bah! you are a brace of prodigals, *mais écoutez*. L'excessive complaisance nous attire des méprises, et nous fait passer pour des dupes."

"Ah! that is a sentiment of your infidel poet, Voltaire," said Bathurst, "but I attach little importance to an opinion of his."

A cloud for the first time shaded the open brow of the marquis.

"You attach but little import to an opinion of the first genius of his age; you speak with a strange and unbecoming levity upon a point on which it would appear you are wholly incompetent to judge."

"Pardon me, does your lordship refer to the term infidel tacked to the name of the 'Philosopher of Fernay.'"

"I do," the marquis gravely rejoined.

"But your lordship cannot surely question the justice of its application. Why, from earliest childhood I remember to have shuddered at the name of Voltaire. It has always been associated

in my mind with the most confirmed heresy, the most glaring infidelity."

"And it is upon this very ground that I denounce a practice so manifestly unjust; it is because the fact is, as you term it, so established a one, that I would seek, not to rescue the poet's memory from condemnation, but to defend it from the harsh and unmeasured, I had almost said cowardly, invectives heaped upon it; cowardly, for he no longer lives to refute them, though the fire of his ashes is not yet extinct. The infidelity of Voltaire has passed into a proverb, it is in the mouth of every idle schoolboy and unlettered hind in the kingdom; never is his name uttered but the epithets 'arch infidel,' 'daring atheist,' are, as you express it, tacked to it, and I need hardly point out the influence of such an association, on young minds especially."

"You are right," said Castleton, "lessons instilled in early youth are rarely, if ever, forgotten; they grow with our growth, they strengthen with our strength; they enslave the boy, they prejudice the man."

"Exactly; and observe, Castleton," and the marquis spoke rapidly, and even vehemently, "the pupil is taught to avoid the baneful errors into which scepticism would lead his unwary steps, and the tutor points to the name of Vol-

taire as the head of that school, as though the divine truths could not be made manifest without citing him as an example of apostasy ; meanwhile his high moral qualities, that half redeem his errors, are wholly without count."

"Oh, believe me," returned Castleton, "I enter my hearty protest against a system of personal rancour, directed against even the most corrupt. No, let every man be fairly judged, and stand or fall by his own merits, or demerits, alone ; but do not initiate prejudices into the human mind in the very cradle, do not make a man—

" ' A fixed figure, for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at.'

Yet I would not be misapprehended, Bathurst : I am rather condemning an iniquitous system than upholding the 'Sage of Fernay,' for I am free to confess he has wrought much evil among men."

"He has indeed, my lord, such evil as only a gigantic intellect such as his could achieve. When a mighty arm is outstretched, when the power of genius, the flash of wit, the blaze of eloquence, are all, with one accord, arrayed against Omnipotence, who may venture to affix a limit to the extent of mischief disseminated?"

"Ah, there lies your mistake, his arrows were

not levelled against Omnipotence ; however sceptical on some points, an Almighty Ruler was always acknowledged and worshipped by him. Would an infidel pen such a line as this, think you ?

“ ‘ De Dieu qui nous créa la clemence infinie.’ ”

It was not religion, but the dark deeds committed in the name of religion, that the philanthropist warred against, and the doctrine, in his time at least, so universal, that upheld the Deity as a ruthless avenger, rather than the most merciful of fathers.”

“ And yet, my lord, he is reputed to have made a jest of all sacred things. Ridicule was a power he wielded with a demon's malignity. It is a master-spirit in the hands of some ; it was a toy, a plaything in his ; and how few are proof against it. I have known a man uphold a favourite dogma against every argument, every degree of opposition that ingenuity could devise for its overthrow, but it has fallen at once before the cold glance of sarcasm, the withering breath of ridicule. Men have signed away their salvation from mere shame of appearing to desire to save it.”

“ Ah, the lowly ‘ Ayrshire Ploughman ’ could have told this towering eagle, this vain-glorious egotist, that—

"An atheist's laugh's a poor exchange
For Deity offended."

"Have you done, sir?" interrupted the marquis with a haughty air.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, if I have offended you."

"Sir, the apology is due to the dead rather than to the living. You have exhumed the ashes of the dead in order to insult them. For my own part I deny your premises, deny most emphatically that Voltaire ever questioned the soul's immortality, ever denied the existence of a Supreme Being. I doubt indeed, with the palpable evidences of an Almighty Architect before his eyes, whether such a fool ever really lived."

"What, then, would you call Monsieur de Voltaire, sir? If a believer, then the greater his condemnation, in seeking to warp the minds of others."

"I declared my conviction that Voltaire was no atheist, I have not yet pronounced him a believer—a believer, I would be understood to imply, in revealed religion, in the person of the Redeemer."

"I am no casuist, my lord, to comprehend such nice distinctions."

"And yet, Bathurst, without entering into any very acute and subtle disquisition, it would

not be difficult to discern a manifest distinction between the two. Study the author in his works, and you will comprehend this at once."

"No, my lord, willingly I would not suffer myself to be beguiled by the sophistry of this extraordinary man. Dazzled by his brilliancy, I might not immediately detect the fallacy of his reasoning, for genius can fling a halo over crime itself."

"You would not then read his works?"

"Indeed, my lord, I would not."

"And yet you would denounce him as a heretic, an infidel! Charles! Charles! Is this the liberality, the fair dealing of a Christian? Without the smallest reservation you pronounce judgment upon no less important a point than a man's eternal salvation, while you obstinately refuse to adopt the only means by which you can arrive at any certain conclusion in the matter. This is neither equity nor charity. To his readers I might defer, to the slave of prejudice I have nothing to say."

"It strikes me," said Castleton, "that much, very much should be forgiven to minds of super-human structure, minds through which the electric fire burns with more than Etna's heat. It is the essential element of such minds to seek to dive into those mysteries which the less gifted are content to take upon trust."

"True," returned the marquis, "for my own part, indeed, I would not arrogate to myself the right or the capacity to pass judgment on any man as heretic or Christian, it is a point to be settled between him and his Maker ; meanwhile I am not without hope that the universal spirit of philanthropy that distinguished Voltaire may plead against the ' deep damnation of his taking off.'

"It was in other than a spirit of egotism that he is said to have replied to a lady who refused to sit under the same roof with him on account of his religion, 'Sachez, Madame, que j'ai dit plus de bien de Dieu dans un seul de mes vers que vous n'en pensez de toute votre vie.' And why, in summing up the character of Voltaire, is moral worth omitted in the count ? why is that noble deed of his, the enfranchisement of the monks of St. Claude, forgotten ? These miserable wretches, whose food was offal, expiring daily under the torture of the lash, owed their freedom to him and him alone. Why, such a deed would make the fame of ten men !

"Can the avowed enemy of every species of oppression, civil and ecclesiastical, claim no one niggard word of praise ? His large-hearted charity, can it plead nothing against bigot rage ?

"Are the names of Calas and La Barre quite

unknown to you? his generous intercession in behalf of your ill-used countryman Byng, is that forgotten? The lives of these martyrs he could not save—their honour he did. His voice with the force of a moral hurricane swept through the land; his fierce scorn of wrong, his inextinguishable humanity, shamed men out of their tiger-spirit.

“And who better than the priest knows all this? Who better than he knows the unspeakable horrors committed in the name of the church in the Voltairian era? Then why withhold the truth? why proclaim the offence of the man in denouncing the perpetrators of these outrages, yet suppress the facts that originated that offence? Of all living men the priest should least among them be a muzzled slave.

“Well, let the forked and withering tongue of slander wreak its worst vengeance over his mighty ashes, let it rake from his sepulchre each idle jest and ambiguous expression that would detract from his deathless fame. No verdict of man’s can disturb the spirit that it is scarcely presumption to pray may have winged its flight to a pardoning God.”

The marquis seemed strangely moved, but he turned to an open newspaper, as if seeking to end the discussion, and Bathurst, who secretly thought that too much ammunition had already

been wasted on one unworthy powder and shot, had rejoiced at its termination, but from the apprehension that his sweeping censures of the "philosopher of Ferney" had displeased his kind friend.

"I fear, sir," he said with some embarrassment, "that I shall scarcely be the less disposed to venerate Monsieur de Voltaire that he has been the unlucky instrument of exciting the first angry feelings you have, I believe, ever cherished towards me."

His lordship bowed with an obvious air of hauteur.

Bathurst advanced with extended hand. "I need not assure the Marquis de St. Marée how sincerely I hope they may be the last."

The earnest tone, the deprecating air, were resistless. His lordship pressed the hand held out, but the subject was not resumed.

CHAPTER XX.

The fond, confiding air with which she looked up to him seemed to call forth a flush of triumphant pride and cherishing tenderness, as if he doted on his lovely burden for its very helplessness.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

As the ladies declined a visit to the Campo Santo, Castleton's services were in requisition as their cicerone of the morning, while the other two gentlemen set off to explore the horrors of that fearful Golgotha.

So full of light and life, of loveliness and enchantment, is Naples, independently of this dread charnel-house, that the dazzled beholder knows not on what object to fix his regards. If Venice, with few or any classical associations, has contrived to cheat man out of more admiration than ever fell to the share of any other spot in the known world, Naples, so rich in these reminiscences, blended with its local charms, cannot at least be far behind it in the interest it inspires.

Nature and art are rivals here, for more favoured than any other spot, even in genial Italy, as regards her soil and climate, Naples has equal reason to boast of the magnificence

of her structures, and the rich and tasteful decorations of her gardens, terraces, and conservatories.

The Bay of Naples has a world-wide celebrity, and yet the language of the poet, the glow of the painter, must alike fall before the reality, so at least thought Castleton and his companions as they sailed over its transparent waters, the sunbeams irradiating its waveless bosom, and dancing in many a playful and fantastic shape on the white sails of their gaily-trimmed galley. And as they gazed now on Vesuvius, that plague-spot of this fairy land, now on the lofty chain of mountains to the left, and anon upon the innumerable islands and promontories scattered around, with Naples herself stretched before them, and each object reflected in the sparkling tide, the whole appeared an enchantment rather than a reality, for though the works of man formed so powerful an adjunct in this splendid panorama, what were they without the mightier magnificence of an Almighty Architect? The stately temple, the gay flotilla, what were these without the waveless waters of that transparent bay, the bald broad front of those majestic mountains, and before all, beyond all, the glorious sky that canopied them,

“So cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful,
That God alone was to be seen in heaven.”

Far less agreeably, however, had sped the morning with the marquis and Bathurst than with Castleton and his fair companions.

In answer to Madame St. Marée's thoughtless question, "How have you been amused, Louis?" her husband re-echoed the word "amused" in an amazed tone.

"My love, we have been to the Campo Santo, and trust me there is no sight in Naples, I hope in all Italy, half so sad, I should rather say so revolting, as this noxious den. Nothing that I can remember has ever so impressed me with horror in its naked sense."

"It is a fearful spectacle," said Castleton; "strange that so refined a people should exhibit so little delicacy where so much is called for."

"Well," said her ladyship, "we will try what Grisi's strains can do to charm away the foul fiend—she plays, Norma."

"No, Mary, no, an angel's silvery voice would fail to-night. It would but sound in my ears as the requiem for the dead I have this day beheld jostled together like the carcasses of slaughtered beasts. Truly was it 'the grave without the coffin, the sleep without the shroud,' for no shell, no covering, enshrines the mouldering bones of these hapless wretches; this is indeed to be given over to corruption; but why appal you with a description? and here comes our sun-

beam, Florence. We challenge, to-night, her brightest smiles to dispel the gloom. There, Charles, I turn you over to Mdlle. de Malcé."

But the smiles of Mdlle. de Malcé were not for the love-sick youth, and well he knew it; ah! had he but flown the dangerous snare! Alack the day, when had the lessons of wisdom the ghost of a chance against the wiles of Dan Cupid? Even my Lord Castleton might perhaps have done a sager thing when he sought his chamber, than sit long, long after the goblin hour of midnight at his window, his eyes turned to Baia's classic shore, but his thoughts bent on one fairer than the fairest daughters of Italy, his pure, his beautiful, his affianced Florence; from her his thoughts wandered to her father, that generous and lamented friend.

How confidingly had he entrusted his darling to his guardian care, and how precious, how sacred was that trust, how deep its responsibility. Impressed with a sense of its almost awful import, Castleton, as in that hour that witnessed the dissolution of the Count, sunk upon his knees, and solemnly in the face of heaven once more pledged himself to its fulfilment.

Yes, he would watch over and protect her even as though she were his own, his wedded wife.

But alas! there came with this resolve a recollection of the world and its calumnies, and it struck coldly upon the ardour of his feelings. No, that must not be; for her dear sake he must weigh well each word and action, lest a breath of suspicion should light upon her purity, or the singleness and integrity of his own motives.

She, too, so tender, true, and trusting! and he gave a world of sighs to the necessity that bound him in honour not to claim a husband's right of protection for so long, in Love's calendar, so very long a period.

There was something irresistibly endearing in the trusting softness of Florence's nature to one of Lord Castleton's peculiar temperament; true, it was a sacred trust to which he had pledged himself, the guardianship of this fair orphan, but her utter and most innocent abandonment of herself to his guidance rendered it in his conception a thousand times more so.

Castleton, the high-minded, the devoted Castleton, could never have loved the haughty and capricious beauty who exacted homage as her born due, and yielded her affections rather as the condescensions of a sovereign queen than as a gentle, loving woman. He could be to one of softer mould all that man *should* be to woman, all that she should desire him to be—her de-

voted lover, her tenderest friend, protector, comforter, but never her slave. Not the fondest mother had watched over the sole darling of her hopes with a more yearning solicitude, and she who can fetter a noble heart in such soft bondage may be prouder of her sway than if she boasted the purchased homage of thousands.

CHAPTER XXI.

Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay.

RAPE OF THE LOCK.

MINDFUL of his friend's solicitude on the subject of his protracted stay abroad, Castleton wrote most fully touching his political views, and if Herbert still thought his arguments in favour of a yet further delay less convincing than he could have desired, they at least left him without anxiety as to the ultimate issue of events. No period, it is true, was definitively fixed for his return, but the early spring was referred to with more than a probability of it, and to this Herbert clung; he could not bear that his friend with his lofty character, his enlarged views, and noble independence, should be but a "cypher in the great account."

To return to Naples, beautiful, sunny Naples,

where, with no alloy to his paradise, Castleton was more than content to dream away existence in all the luxury which the full confidence of loving and being loved can impart.

It was not alone over her affianced husband that the spells of Florence de Malcé were flung.

Beautiful, radiantly beautiful, as she confessedly was, it was the kind of breathing eloquence, "the mind, the music," involving her whole person, that rendered her so resistless, a loveliness that found its way at once to the heart.

Gradually, as the memory of her father's loss grew something fainter, her wondrous fascinations shone out. A very spirit of mirth seemed she, with her sportive sallies, her bewildering smiles; and then that light, joyous laugh, the veriest stoic had been moved by it. Not a few were the tales Mamma St. Gérán had to tell of its power over her, when Florence, a mischievous little elf, would, on the perpetration of some tricksome deed, fling her dimpled arms round her neck, and, after a wistful gaze into her face in quest of a relenting token, immediately on detecting it, burst into such an uncontrollable peal that the very air around was musical with the sweet sounds.

Castleton, it may be believed, never wearied of these reminiscences of the childish days of his idolized Florence. There was yet another who

listened, and was lost. Young, inexperienced, and certainly susceptible, it was little marvel that Charles Bathurst should be enthralled by a loveliness he believed unequalled. Yet he loved without a shadow of hope. He knew, and had known from the first, that the maiden was betrothed, and reason might have told him that his only safety lay in flight; but, alas! at nineteen we are not the most subtle casuists; in a conflict between duty and inclination, the former rarely comes off victor. At nineteen it is not easy to resist the captivation that lurks in the liquid lustre of a dark eye, or the yet more soul-subduing softness of a blue one. At nineteen the heart is not adamant, and Florence de Malcé was passing fair.

It may seem strange that this passion on the part of his young favourite should have escaped the penetration of the marquis, but among their little circle the engagement of the Earl of Castleton to his ward was so well understood that it never occurred to him that any one short of a lunatic would encourage an affection for a fiancée, he had indeed regarded it in the light of a profanation towards Florence herself.

So little idea in truth did he entertain of the existence of such folly, that he would frequently rally poor Charles upon his apparent indifference to more than one Italian donna.

Observing him one morning by the open window, lost in reverie, he roused him with a gay remonstrance. "Still loitering within, Charles, instead of basking in the sunshine of Neapolitan loveliness—cannot yonder houri, the Signorina Bianca, lure you to the Cascina? she and la madre have just driven by."

The whole party had recently passed the day at the Villa Napoli, and had been introduced to the young daughter of the house.

"She is bewilderingly beautiful, Charles."

"Is she, sir?"

"Nay, is she not?"

"Possibly—no doubt; your lordship's taste is unimpeachable."

"But it differs with yours, you would infer?"

"Indeed, sir, I scarcely observed the lady, she is surely very youthful?"

"Oh, if youth be the drawback she will mend of that."

"The fair Capulet could scarcely have been her age when she enthralled the Montague," said Castleton.

"And let me tell you, Master Charles," remonstrated the marquis, "this same season of girlhood is a very witching one, with its tears and its smiles, its tenderness and truth. I own, I think, nothing in after-life, where so much is

sacrificed upon the cold altar of fashion, can compensate its loss."

"And who," inquired her ladyship, entering the room, "is the Iphigenia about to be immolated?"

"No one, I hope. Burnt-offerings and sacrificial knives have had their day. I was seriously recommending Charles to enter the lists for the favour of the Lady Bianca; again, too, the solitary scion of her race, she will inherit a mine of wealth."

"And that's a beggar's bargain," languidly rejoined the youth.

"Does this glimpse of Golconda fire your cupidity?" inquired Castleton.

"Indeed no, my lord. I think it would rather have a chilling influence."

A bright smile was Castleton's only reply.

"Nay, nay," said the marquis, "the beauty of a Helen, with untold treasures in the stocks, form no mean marriage dowry either. Who would not adventure for such merchandise?"

"Not I, sir, if my heart remained untouched."

"But how, unless it be indurated as marble, and cold as iced champagne, can it remain untouched, the captivations considered?"

"I know not how or why, my lord, that which attracts one man repels another, and I say

with Claudio, 'let every eye negotiate for itself, and trust no agent.'"

"Your sangfroid may prove your safety-valve," subjoined her ladyship, "for were your heart doubly cased in marble, the stiletto's point would find a pass to it. The maiden is affianced, so beware of Italian jealousy, and be the Caven-dish motto yours—'secure in caution.'"

"Say rather the more daring one—'take me and fly,' with the winged horse for your device," added his lordship. "Then see whether your Juliet will not give the 'County Paris' the go-by and wed the Montague. Seriously, if I have any skill in translating the eyes' expression, there is that in this young girl's that speaks not of happiness. Gilded halls and silk attire will not always make a glad heart. I question if she much affects this Count Gastri, with his fifty winters over his head. Report says there has been a rupture in the families too; I'd enter the lists, Charles."

"Thank you, sir, I have no ambition to catch a heart on the rebound, even if I had the vanity to try for it."

"What, not with a couple of estates in prospective?"

"Not with a dozen in prospective."

"Perhaps you are wise, one *in esse* is worth a

score in reversion ; yet marriage without capital is a poor investment I suppose ?”

“ Well, au revoir, Sir Knight of the icy heart, I wish you much joy of your stoicism ;” and his lordship and Castleton left the room together.

“ Stoicism !” echoed the youth with a bitter smile. “ Oh, that I could behold all other charms with equal stoicism !”

Unmindful, perhaps unconscious of the presence of Madame St. Marée, he sunk with a weary sigh into a bergère. The bright smile of her ladyship vanished, the playful sally hovering on her lip was suspended in its utterance. There was something in the words, yet more in the woe-stricken gaze that accompanied them, that struck a chill to her heart, though with a true woman's instinct in such matters she had long suspected what she now felt assured of, that her young favourite had perilled the whole wealth of his fresh warm heart in an argosy that must perforce be wrecked. That he loved the betrothed of another, and of course hopelessly.

Without a word she glided from the room, unwilling that he should guess she had been a witness to his emotion, and having gained her chamber, there revolved in her mind the best method of checking the progress of this most untoward affair.

Strange to say her ladyship, though neither

very old, nor altogether unromantic, did not laugh at or ridicule this folly of the youth, she did better, she compassionated it, and determined, moreover, that she would inviolably guard his secret, for she had too high an opinion of his honour and good sense to imagine he would be ambitious of betraying it himself. She would dissuade him too from remaining with them, but here she doubted if her rhetoric would avail, unless she frankly avowed her motive, and this it would be obviously impolitic to do, for she not unwisely judged, that unless he were very far gone indeed, the less notice taken of the matter the more likely it would be to die a natural death.

"Surely," she mentally argued, "the very hopelessness of his passion will operate as its most effectual extinguisher."

CHAPTER XXII.

We greet you, sirs, with hearty welcome.

WE are never, perhaps, more inclined to set a just estimate upon the society of friends than when we experience its cheering effects in a foreign land. There is a special charm in the

aspect of a countryman, which, reminding us of home with all its delightful associations, inspires a more grateful sense of happiness. Thus Mr. Vivian and his gay, good-humoured nephew proved a most agreeable addition to the social circle now quartered at Naples, often spending whole evenings in sprightly converse, or accompanying the party in their drives or walks in the vicinity.

Frank Vivian seemed, indeed, not a little pleased to escape from the graver tutelage of his uncle, whom he, nevertheless, dearly loved, to laugh away a few hours in society more congenial to his age and temperament. Young, handsome, and volatile, with an unencumbered estate in possession and another in reversion, he had little to do but to enjoy life, and he did enjoy it too, albeit in a somewhat latitudinarian spirit; but he was a high-hearted, generous fellow, whom the sagest could scarcely find it in their hearts very severely to blame. Without his extravagances—for they did not amount to grave faults—he had not been half so delightful.

Bathurst was, perhaps, the only one who did not enter cordially into the full dash and tear of his thoughtless, racy humour, but he had grown sad of late, sadder since Vivian had come among them, sadder still since the fair Florence had lavished her brightest smiles upon him, while

he, to the jaundiced eye of the youth, gazed with audacious admiration upon her.

One day the marchioness, between whom and Vivian there existed that degree of sympathy which one lively temperament is sure to entertain for another, had been rallying him on the versatility of his sentiments, telling him she should henceforth style him "Sir Proteus."

"Forgive me, madam," he returned; "no title can be less appropriate; the needle is not truer to the pole than I to 'one bright particular star,' the object of all my idolatry."

He laid his hand upon his heart as he spoke, and bowed low to Florence; but though thus making unmistakable the "bright particular star" implied, he was so volatile that everybody laughed except Bathurst,—he was marveling how Vivian, the acquaintance of a day, had contrived to establish himself upon so familiar a footing with the beautiful girl as to bandy jests with her, and pour into her—he fancied not unwilling ear—such a running fire of compliments, while he, hourly associated with her for months past, had scarcely courage sufficient to pay her the ordinary civilities which courtesy demanded.

"Yet he cannot love her as I do," he mentally ejaculated; and the recollection of how unavailing that love must prove increased his dejection.

Leaning against the mantelpiece, his head supported by his arm, he fell into a reverie, from which he was roused by Vivian.

"Bathurst, if you have half an ounce of quicksilver in that inflexible frame of yours, do come to my rescue—poor stricken deer that I am! Are you studying a pose for the 'Il Penseroso?' no, 'Il Penseroso' was a lady. For an emblem of primeval silence, then?"

"Neither, neither," returned the youth, rallying at once from a dread of exciting further notice. "On what service am I challenged to aid the redoubtable Mr. Frank Vivian?"

"Well, we are canvassing the merits of the 'Duel.'"

"And its demerits, Mr. Bathurst," said Florence, raising her starry eyes, in whose expression there lay a world of perilous rhetoric, to his.

"Your pardon, sweetest lady, it *was* the pour et contre, I remember," interposed Vivian. "Now, Mr. Bathurst, would you, I ask, suffer another, another of the genus homo, to interfere with you in—in—let me see—well, in une affaire de cœur? for, as Sir Lucius would say, 'I take that to be the highest affront one gentleman can put upon another.' Now, would you suffer this without favouring him with a cartel?"

"Mr. Bathurst will not, I am so sure, advo-

cate duelling," murmured Florence, in the softest and most insinuating of tones.

"Hold hard!" cried out Vivian; "bribery and corruption to all intents and purposes. Ah! Madlle. de Malcé, who would not be bought over by that heavenly smile—those silvery accents?"

Never man looked in a more delectable state of perplexity than Bathurst; he would have given all he possessed to have been able to declare his unqualified disapprobation of the duel, but, out of humour with his interrogator, with himself, and perhaps with all around him, he really regarded it with no small degree of complacency, as presenting a speedy mode of being rid of the various 'shocks that flesh is heir to;' he felt, moreover, that at this identical moment he could, without a shadow of compunction, have sent a bullet whizzing through Frank Vivian's audacious brains.

"Nay, no temporizing," Bathurst. 'To be, or not to be? that is the question.' You have come into court on Madlle. de Malcé's gage, touching the sagacity of your judgment, and that might inspire the dullest dunce to become a Daniel."

The young man darted an indignant look at his tormentor.

"I know," he returned, crimsoning to the

brows, "all Madlle. de Malcé would wish me to say, or rather," he stammered, "all she has the goodness to expect from me; but even the honour, the happiness, of winning her approval must not tempt me to belie my conscience so far as to decide against this mode of settling disputes—within certain limitations."

"Oh, wise young judge! how I do honour thee!" exclaimed Vivian, slapping him smartly on the shoulder, while his really good-natured uncle turned a severe look upon him.

"I am sorry to hear you admit as much, young sir. To my thinking, neither honour nor honesty, no, nor true courage, have place in the character of the duellist. Duelling is only another and politer name for murder."

"Qualify it, at least, as scientific and legitimate murder," persisted his nephew.

"Sir, nothing can legalize crime—murder is murder, no matter by whom perpetrated. I care not for the dictum of the world of fashion, which has its own particular verdicts for its own particular crimes."

"Pray, Mr. Vivian, what would you suggest as a substitute for the duel?" inquired the marquis with the nonchalance of a Frenchman on this subject. "Would you have a gentleman knock under to an affront?"

"Ay, show the white feather," interposed

Vivian, "or resort, like the gentry of the ring, to fisticuffs or a cudgel?"

"Better these than the assassin's dagger, sir," said his uncle.

"'Angels of grace defend us!' A duellist an assassin! A new reading in the code morale."

"But the true one, Frank, and a deliberate and determined assassin too, for he has not the poor excuse of passion to palliate the deed. But, Castleton, are you dumb?"

"I believe I had better be," he smilingly rejoined.

"But you must surely think with me."

"Ah! that's just it, my dear sir, I can't think with you."

The softly-murmured "Stratford!" from the rosy lips of Florence was drowned in the vehement accents of Vivian.

"Of course you can't; my dear uncle, a man must not alone be a coward, but demented too, to refuse a challenge, except in a case of mere ruffianism."

"And there," said Castleton, "I confess to a predilection in favour of a horsewhip."

"But," interposed the elder Vivian, bent if possible on securing his lordship as an ally, 'you would not surely draw your sword in a duel?'

"Most certainly I would not keep it sheathed under an insult, sir."

"Not exactly," da-capoed Vivian. "Verdict for the plaintiff;" and the discussion ended.

The entire morning of the succeeding day was set apart for the interesting but painful occupation of exploring the ruins of Pompeii, for unless the visitor can divest himself alike of feeling and imagination, painful indeed must be the sensations called forth by the sight of these awful relics of dead centuries.

Well may it be called "a vision of departed days." Twice seven hundred years rolled on ere a sign of this devoted city was discovered. Men knew only the site on which it had once stood, and that the living had found a tomb where

"The smouldering ashes spread
A pall above the dying and the dead."

All else was wild conjecture; what wonders then, and oh! what sights of horror were presented to view when the truth in all its appalling and naked details was fully revealed. Even at this distance of time human sympathies are awakened, and men shudder at the fate of the "doomed city."

Thrones sink to dust, and nations pass away, but not like this! Oh, not like this!

Embowelled within the earth ; the light of day, the breath of heaven excluded, the work of decay had sped but slowly. Those who first penetrated these abodes of the departed after their disinterment were struck with the strange appearance the scene presented, of the real blended with the unreal, of life and of death ; but life without warmth, death without its usual symbols ; for the unshrouded victims in their painted trappings reposed, not within the marble sepulchre, but in the gorgeous chamber, in the festive halls, 'mid clustering columns of patrician splendour ; halls which yet in fancy seemed to echo the sounds of laughter and of song.

Yes, 'twas an awful fiat that doomed that gay and lovely city so to perish ! But it came, the decree came forth, a dread ambassador from heaven, and how few of those so lately revelling in the sunshine of life escaped to tell the maddening tale.

Mysterious Providence ! thy ways are indeed inscrutable ; bliss, cloying bliss, the portion of one ; woe, unutterable, interminable woe, that of another ; and that other, perchance, the best, the bravest ! Yet hold ! through what imperious track would such imaginings lead us ?

“ Be still, my soul, nor dare inquire the cause,
Nor yet a moment on the mystery pause.”

We may not, must not, measure our poor wisdom 'gainst infinity. Human intelligence cannot compass the grandeur of Omniscience. Then let us bow before the Chastener, and go on our way unquestioning.

The evening of the day on which Pompeii had been visited was passed by our travellers at Mr. Vivian's tasteful villa on the borders of the superb bay.

Frank Vivian, who stood without the portico to bid them welcome, led the way to an elegant saloon, opening into a spacious garden overlooking the bay, from whence came the most refreshing breezes, mingled with the odour of the choicest flowers and aromatic shrubs.

"And you have really made an excursion to Pompeii without me, Madlle. de Malcé," said Vivian.

The lady only smiled.

"But is it really true, too, that you voted against my accompanying you?"

"Most true!" echoed Bathurst, a little spitefully, while Florence blushed, smiled, and bowed.

"Alas, what possible offence can have drawn down this heavy punishment upon me?"

"None, none in the world," she returned with an earnest, deprecating air, for her gentle nature recoiled at the thought of inflicting a

moment's pain, even in jest; "forgive me, but is not the 'buried City' just the very place which we should not visit in gay company? for, however replete with interest, it is of that mournful and absorbing character which you can only truly feel and understand in silence and solitude.

" 'It seemed as Echo's self were dead
In that sad place, so mute our tread.' "

"But were *you* there in silence and solitude?"

"Ah, no! but we all moved in the train of the pensive goddess; the lightest laugh had jarred upon the sense in a scene so sad as that."

"But surely Madlle. de Malcé would not do me the injustice to believe me incapable of receiving solemn impressions from solemn scenes?"

Again the lady smiled—a too enchanting smile.

"Mr. Vivian must forgive me if I remind him that I have never heard him beat time to other than an allegro measure."

"Good sooth, sweet lady, but you owe me reparation for this wrong."

"Oh, don't call me out, Mr. Vivian," and her little hands were folded beseechingly together.

"Mercy, Sir Knight, mercy!"

And Vivian thought as she stood there in all

her witchery, that if adoring worship might kill, she stood in sore peril.

"All mercy shall be accorded you, sweet lady, so you revoke your hard judgment, and own that I can, when occasion suits, be grave as—as——"

"The 'melancholy Jaques,' Frank, you have come to a stand."

"Ah, Castleton, you can hardly believe how much I am impressed with this sort of thing."

"Hardly, I confess."

"By what sort of thing, Mr. Vivian?" archly asked Florence.

"'Mouldering walls and buried cities,' lady,

"'Wandering in caves forlorn

Midst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy.'"

"Oh, there, Mr. Vivian, you are a league beyond me; be grateful that you are not enlisted in our detachment, for you are just the one to visit Pompeii alone, if all this be true."

"Yes, go alone, Frank."

Vivian pulled a rueful face.

"You have left me without an alternative it seems."

"Nay, but it is the only way truly to appreciate the scene. A strange impression fastens itself upon the imagination, that you stand in the halls of the living, yet not of the living as

we might behold them now, a kind of shuddering belief seizes you that you will be disturbed in your unhallowed researches by the ghosts of the departed."

"How delightful!" moaned Vivian. "I had best look to my pistols; but phantoms, I believe, are bullet-proof."

"This is merely the delusion of a first visit," continued Castleton.

"And I am half sorry for it," said Florence, "for though I am afraid it is a little wrong, I confess I do like to lose myself among these fairy dreams of the imagination."

"Who does not? and why is it a little wrong?" asked Vivian, bending on the beautiful enthusiast a look of ardent admiration not unnoted by Bathurst, who turned away with a quivering sigh. "In my opinion no gratification can be more harmless; so few realities—pleasurable ones I mean—are allowed to gild the horizon of our every-day life, that it is sound philosophy to cherish the ideal, and take your chance for the substantial."

Florence shook back her clustering curls and turned her radiant eyes full upon the speaker.

"And this is sound philosophy, is it, Mr. Vivian? Thank you very much for helping to reconcile me to myself; the doctrine, if new, is none the less alluring."

"Alluring and of indubitable wisdom, believe me, lady, for I am a tolerably profound casuist. Obviously, philosophy is reason, and philosophy and reason being thus identical, are very decidedly—you catch my meaning, Madlle. de Malcée?"

"Indeed, Mr. Vivian, I do not. That 'your exposition hath been most sound' I nothing doubt, but I am not a profound casuist; philosophy and reason being identical—pray go on."

"Yes; philosophy being based on reason, is obviously beyond—beyond——"

"Beyond you, Frank. That you are a profound casuist is undeniable, only you are getting a trifle out of your depth."

"Not at all, my dear Castleton; but the fact is, I have naturally some hesitation in discussing such a subject as philosophy with ladies."

"And reason they are still less acquainted with," insinuated the marchioness.

"Why, the fact is, madam, I shrewdly suspect this same reasoning faculty not unfrequently leads us a strange will-o'-the-wisp chase over bog and through briar, while inclination, if you but loose the rein—give her her head, in short, wins the race."

"A thousand to one but she does," said Castleton. "Plato, thou reasonest well."

Florence broke into one of her silvery laughs.

How dearly the mirthful girl loved all this badinage, and how delightedly Castleton listened to each word that fell from her rosy lips.

"What is it all about?" inquired their host.

"Mr. Vivian is proving, or trying to prove, that the truest wisdom consists in following the bent of your inclination."

"Ah! it's all up with me, I see," moaned Vivian.

Just then Bathurst, in reply to the marquis, said in a low but somewhat earnest tone, "Yes, it was for her sake I made the sacrifice. I knew how dearly she loved me."

This was enough for Vivian, who had overheard the words; the key-note was given.

"Hush! hush! Mr. Bathurst, you shock my sensibilities!" Then affecting a whisper, "Never boast of your *bonnes fortunes*; *les affaires du cœur* are sacred among men of honour."

The youth crimsoned to the brow.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Vivian. I am as incapable as yourself of the meanness, nay, falsehood, you impute to me. My words, if you are commenting on them, referred to my mother," he had answered with spirit; but it was, nevertheless, in a faltering voice that he added, "I, at least, whatever success may attend you, have none of which to boast."

Madame St. Géran, with whom Charles

Bathurst was in especial favour, whispered the marchioness, "Il a un esprit facile, ce Monsieur Vivian, mais assurément l'autre est piqué au vif, d'ailleurs c'est bon garçon."

"N'ayez pas peur," whispered back her ladyship. "Bathurst is often more than a match for him."

"Ah oui, il sait bien conduire sa barque," returned the kind old lady, vexed, nevertheless, that her young favourite should be thrown into the shade by their newer friend, whose humour she did not exactly enter into, but she fancied that Bathurst was at times disconcerted by his gay remarks. Nor was she mistaken, for Vivian, older by several years, with a far more extensive knowledge of the world, assumed with perfect nonchalance that position in society from which Bathurst's youth and inexperience necessarily excluded him, and though the feeling his profounder character was calculated to inspire might be more enduring, there was so resistless a charm in Vivian's perfect gaieté de cœur that every one caught the infection, and voted him a most charming addition to the circle.

Real gaiety, like good temper, is so engaging, that it is akin to a sin to check it by an intervention of the cold ceremonials of form.

CHAPTER XXIII.

What mighty contests spring from trivial things.

So in years gone by sung the immortal author of the "Rape of the Lock," and so, though sylphs and gnomes and all the "light militia of the lower sky" no longer disturb our slumbers, may we still sing. As the open calèche in which the ladies of our party, attended by the gentlemen on horseback, were driving down the Strada Toleda, an officer in the French uniform, young, and of distinguished bearing, reined in his horse with a sudden but graceful movement, as, rising in his stirrups, he removed his cap and bowed to his saddle-bow with a marked and deferential air to Mademoiselle de Malcé. The lady, too, half rose, and twice bent to the stranger's salutation, waiving her hand in adieu as the carriage slowly passed. As she resumed her seat she turned involuntarily to Castleton, who rode beside her. In a moment her cheek was dyed with blushes, and in the next tears sprung to her eyes. What was it in the face of her guardian that conjured the blushes to that fair cheek, the tears to those violet eyes? She *should* have read nothing there but love *for* her, trust *in* her, for ungrudgingly had she given *him* her whole wealth of love and confidence.

In his sudden paleness and contracted brow she read pain, if not displeasure: the cause she could not doubt. In the handsome young officer whom they had just encountered, Castleton must have recognized the stranger of the Pavilion.

And what then? Had he, after all that his ward had ventured upon in the way of explanation of that matter, a right to question either her tenderness or her discretion? Perhaps he did neither, but the proud sensibilities of the man were for the moment startled and wounded. The timid glance of his betrothed, so deprecatory in its expression, might have softened a tiger. For an instant her scrutinizing eyes rested mournfully, almost reproachfully, upon him, in the next she turned sighing away.

Was Lord Castleton's disposition a mistrustful one then? No, on all hands no; not for a single moment could such an idea harbour in a breast so soft as Florence de Malcé's. Too many proofs indeed of a nature essentially generous and confiding had she received to raise a question in the matter. Love too is ever prone to find excuse for the loved one. In this instance she mentally argued he had a plea for his disquietude, a mystery existed, and though that mystery in but a very slight degree affected her, a mystery it was, and to Castleton's sense

she was involved in it, and this should not be, —nay, must not be ; at all hazards she would put an end to it, and that at once. By a frank and full avowal of the facts of the case her lover's mind would be at once relieved from the last lingering shade of uneasiness that might weigh upon it. Such avowal had been due to Lord Castleton as her guardian ; how much more his due then as her affianced husband. True, the revelation of certain circumstances in connection with the young officer would give pain to another, that other too one whom she fondly loved, but was this to weigh against the love and duty she owed to him to whom she stood bound by a tie the most solemn and sacred ? Strengthened by her resolve to confide everything to her guardian, or rather to prevail upon Madame St. Géran to do so, for there were some features connected with the affair which could hardly be canvassed between her and Stratford, Florence was presently chatting gaily as ever, and when Castleton as was his wont assisted her to alight, she looked into his face with a tender and radiant smile.

Passing at once into the salon, Castleton, ashamed of his weakness yet unable wholly to shake it off, leaned against the mantel-piece in painful reverie. But not long was he suffered to stand there alone ; in that soft low voice that

was ever as sweetest music to his ear, he heard his name breathed, and she, his best beloved, stole into his arms.

The melting tenderness of her whispered words, the gaze of earnest love which seemed so anxious to atone for the involuntary pain inflicted, sunk deep into Stratford's inmost soul, awakening all the warm and generous impulses of his nature.

Often in after times when his harassed spirit reverted to the contemplation of that hour, he would derive a transient gleam of comfort from the recollection of all it had promised.

"Dear Stratford, Madame St. Géran is agitated by this little incident, but all shall be explained this evening, this very evening."

In vain Castleton protested against all explanation, in vain implored Florence to pardon his most unpardonable folly; despite entreaties and protests it was not difficult for the young girl to read in the instantaneous brightening of his countenance the relief that her assurance of clearing up the mystery afforded him. And so that evening it was cleared away. Stratford's version from Madame St. Géran's brief but painful narrative was transmitted on the following day to Herbert.

It appeared that early in life Madame St. Géran had been left a widow, almost a penniless

widow, and mother of one little girl. Compelled by stress of circumstances to place her child in a French family while she herself obtained an asylum in England, many years elapsed before they again met.

Meanwhile at a very tender age Mademoiselle St. Géran attracted the attention of a gentleman of family and fortune, an Englishman making the tour of Europe. Serious thoughts of marriage however with an obscure foreigner were not within the pale of the gentleman's *honourable* intentions. But there were difficulties in his path on the road to ruin which were uncalculated upon. The purity of Mademoiselle St. Géran's mind presented a formidable barrier to his project of making her his on his own terms; *that* mind would not have borne so much as the faintest perception of stain, and this he discovered, when with the worldling's sophistry he sought to win her to his views, and found her literally too innocent to comprehend their nature. But alas! young and inexperienced, without other counsellor against the tempter than her own trusting heart, she fell a partial victim to the snare laid for her.

Married under a false name, according to the rites of the Romish Church only, it was no hard matter, when no longer inflamed by passion, for her betrayer to dissolve a connection which,

though legal in the essential forms, had been thus loosely held together ; and so, on the eve of becoming a mother, with weary wing and a broken heart, Cecile St. Géran, or Langley (for by that name had she known the deceiver), found herself a disowned wife—alone in the world's wide wilderness. Her story incapable of substantiation, for every evidence of her marriage had been artfully removed, the unhappy girl lived but to place her infant in her mother's arms, sinking into the grave she literally yearned to fill.

Worse than orphaned, and a pauper, her nameless boy found a generous protector in the Count de Malcé, who at the age of sixteen placed him at the Military College.

Madame St. Géran was gentle to a fault, but with the gentle and undemonstrative there is often an under-current of strong resolution which will resist every effort to break it down ; this characteristic may not manifest itself throughout the tenure of a long life, but there it is, ready for action if circumstances arise to call it forth. Mingled with a softness that approached to infirmity, this one strong point was to be found in the constitution of Madame St. Géran, whose feelings had been so cruelly lacerated, so basely outraged, and it showed itself in a withering contempt, an absolute loathing,

for her daughter's betrayer. If that man, cowering beneath a sense of remorse for the great woe he had heaped alike upon the living and the dead, had crawled on his knees to her feet for pardon, she had spurned him where he knelt. He might, she argued, offer restitution to the living son, he could not call up the spirit of the dead and heal the broken heart. Her child had gone down to the grave in the flush of her youth, with the arrow in her heart. Her blighted name, her early tomb, had been his work, and if she did not curse him, she yet felt in the innermost depths of her soul that it had been sheer hypocrisy to say she could forgive that man.

Well, all this was sad, sinful perhaps, we should forgive our enemies, but "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." The bereaved mother dwelt less on the Christian rule which exhorts to pardon than on the stupendous wrong wrought by the hand of her child's destroyer, and she had loved that child as only a widowed mother *can* love an only child. Besides, he had *not* sought to make atonement. For more than twenty years after the weary heart had ceased to beat, no token of his very existence transpired.

The concealment of the real name stifled all inquiry ; so far, indeed, as Madame St. Géran

had been allowed a voice in the matter, none had ever been sanctioned, but the late Count de Malcé had judged more wisely than the poor outraged old lady, so when at the expiration of nearly one and twenty years the son of Cecile Langley discovered that Percy Selwyn, of Old Court, Kent, and Castle Lennard, Norfolk, was his sire, and that the said Percy Selwyn was willing, nay desirous, to make him (dependent on certain conditions) an ample allowance, and to promote his interests in any way that he himself should point out; the Count de Malcé did not judge it expedient altogether to close the door against such advances, and thereby ignore any benefit that might hereafter accrue to him out of the justice, or any softened feeling on the part of the father. But the mother—the poor mother of the murdered girl—was not to be propitiated. With or without conditions, she spurned all overtures. One offer, and one only, had won her to a recognition of this tardy grace, that one was the full and free acknowledgment of his son's rights as the lawful issue of his marriage with her daughter; for though no proof had ever been in her possession, she had never for a moment made question of her child's honour. Such atonement as this, however, from the heartless deserter of the most sacred ties it was preposterous to expect. Nevertheless, the

demand for justice was made, and was peremptorily refused ; the demand could not be enforced, for the marriage was denied, and proofs were wanting. Pride and prudence thus at issue in the breast of the young soldier, Madame St. Géran conquered, Mr. Selwyn's conditions were rejected, and matters remained much in the same state as before the recent disclosures, save and except a most unhappy breach between Madame St. Géran and her grandson, the result of a refusal on his part, under the strict prohibition of his father and the advice of the Count, to adopt the name of Selwyn in place of the one he had heretofore borne, and the same under which the master of Old Court had married his mother. Till the late discovery of his father's identity with Mr. Selwyn, there had always existed on the part of the son, a faint hope that Langley might be the name he was lawfully entitled to bear, and now that he was undeceived and forbidden to assume his legitimate one, he resolved to retain it till his mother's marriage could be substantiated. This was a death-blow to the pride of Madame St. Géran, for out of her very love grew her pride, and she positively refused to see her rebellious grandson under the hated name of Langley. This alienation was, nevertheless, breaking the kind old lady's heart; she longed to embrace her

boy, to be reconciled to him at any cost but that of his good name.

"Would he never," she asked, "yield this point to her prayer? would he persist, by bearing about this badge of illegitimacy—in this open insult to his mother's memory?"

But in this over-urgency with her young relative, Madame St. Géran failed to give due weight to the bearings of the case; with the circumstances, indeed, in detail she was uninformed. Percy Selwyn had long since married into one of the first families in England—his issue by that union was a son, a youth of high promise. Wherein, then, lay the most distant hope that he could be brought to acknowledge as his lawful heir, the son whom he had never seen, whom through life he had abandoned, and, by so doing, bastardize the second son?

Castleton, however, took precisely the same view of the case as the lady; he, too, thought that nothing could justify submission to a wrong which directly reflected upon a mother's fair fame, and he besought her permission to consult his friend Malgrove in the business.

It was well for the Earl of Castleton that his impulses were for the most part good and noble, for his vehement indignation of vice bore down all before it. Well, perhaps enthusiasm, however wild, is preferable to stoicism, which ob-

structs the natural currents of the affections ; and if he had little mercy for the infirmities of others, he was inexorable towards his own. Egotism, at least, had no part in his fine but faulty nature.

“ My narrative is ended,” he wrote to Herbert. “ The old, old story, you see ;—woman’s trust, man’s abuse of that trust ! And now, what think you of the lord of Old Court, and Castle Lennard, the friend of that great and good man whom we both so revered, my late dear and noble father ? To think, Herbert, that he should ever have held this man’s hand in the cordial grasp of honest confidence, that he should have believed in and honoured this miserable betrayer of helpless innocence, this violator of the tenderest ties of our common nature.

“ I have no words to speak my scorn and abhorrence ; but you will aid me to unmask this courtly gentleman, this loyal husband and tender father, who mouths morality with such unction ; you will aid me to proclaim him to the world for what he is. I will not rest till justice is rendered to the defrauded heir, though we oust the usurper, young Arthur Selwyn, from his seat of honour. Poor boy ! my heart bleeds for him, but right, tardy enough, God knows, must be done to the wronged. We must not think of him ; and yet, if the ring of the true metal be

in him, he would die inch by inch rather than grow sleek upon a brother's birthright. And thus, you see, Herbert, is my darling's little mystery at last unravelled. I blush to my fingers' ends as I write, at the remembrance of my folly, and all the pain it cost her gentle nature. Well, it shall go hard but I will requite her. Yet these dreary months that must elapse ere she can, indeed, be all my own! Phantom-like they rise before me, shadowing present joy, and not always unaccompanied by forebodings of coming ill; but these you will tell me are but the hallucinations of a lover's brain. God grant they prove so!

"To return to one of the most inoffensive of beings, poor abused Madame St. Géran and her contumacious grandson, for against him is her wrath kindled to furnace-heat for his refusal to assume the thrice-honoured name of Selwyn—and, mind you, I think he was wrong, morally wrong. It was at the time that she had forbidden him her presence, that my darling, holding a commission from her father, innocently made the memorable appointment with him in the grounds of the Hotel de Ligne.

"You would have smiled had you witnessed her sweet anxiety lest I should condemn the unhappy Cecile St. Géran in this miserable business. I assured her that I saw but little to con-

demn, but that I marvelled much at the singular incaution she betrayed in placing such entire confidence in a stranger.

“‘Ah Stratford,’ she replied, in a voice of melting tenderness, ‘she trusted because she loved. *She* broke no vow, *she* wrung no heart so deeply as her own, and by its trusting love she fell.’

“Herbert, do you think I could refrain from folding my gentle, precious one to my heart of hearts?

“It is this strange softness, this loving, womanly trust that more than all her countless fascinations so endears her to me, and you will love her, too, fondly, even as you already, she has owned to me, hold the second place in her heart.

“Again I am wandering. I mean to set every engine to work for the discovery of the priest who performed the marriage ceremony between Selwyn and Cecile St. Gérân, for that a marriage, in accordance with the rights of the Romish Church, actually took place I entertain not a shadow of doubt about. Unluckily, Madame St. Gérân was at the time in England; sent for when her child was in her last agony, she barely arrived in time to receive her dying embrace. Does not your blood curdle as you picture this scene? Well, all clue was here lost,

for the people with whom Mrs. Selwyn lodged knew only that she had come to them in utter destitution, and that she had given the name of Langley, the only one by which she had ever known her betrayer.

"Herbert! are there no bolts of wrath to fall and crush these perfidious miscreants? Can Heaven look down and suffer them to go on their way unscathed?"

"You will tell me that the inward consciousness of guilt involves the direct punishment to the offender. If this were true, why is atonement so tardy? why, in so many instances, is it altogether withheld? But I shall meet this man face to face; meanwhile, no means shall be left unworked to avenge the dead and right the living.

"Already, Madame St. G eran's brow is lightened of half its cares; ere long she shall lift her head with the proudest."

Within a week of the rencontre in the Strada di Toleda, Lieutenant Langley was a guest at the Hotel Meillerie, the residence of the St. Mar es and their party. Rreconciled to his kinswoman, recognized as a dearly-loved friend of her father's by Mademoiselle de Malc , standing high in the esteem of the Earl of Castleton, the clouds of his evil fortune seemed fast rolling away, leaving in place of them a sunny track

that, skilfully followed up, bore fair promise of leading to a happy issue. Befriended by a powerful and resolute noble, the ultimate recognition of the poor fellow's rights was no longer a matter of doubt, or if difficulties presented themselves to the keener perceptions of Lord Castleton, his spirit only rose with them, and he had already taken active steps in furtherance of the end in view, when a letter from Malgrove changed the aspect of affairs, and suspended all operations for the present.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Who by repentance is not satisfied,
Is nor of heaven nor earth.

“HERBERT MALGROVE to LORD CASTLETON.

“No need, my dear Stratford, to anticipate the Almighty fiat. Bear with patience a brief delay; He will defend the right.

“The innocent victim of Percy Selwyn's perfidy is already avenged, and without the dread necessity of the son winging the arrow to the tortured breast of his own father. That son, without detriment to the pride of conscious rectitude, may now bow his head before the guilt-stained and sorrow-stricken man. Heavy

sorrow is sanctified of God ; while even the mother may forgive the destroyer of her child, for verily his punishment is even unto death—extreme as equitable.

“Suspend awhile, I implore you, all further inquiries into this matter. The hand of God will full soon bring about restitution to the injured. Young Arthur Selwyn, sole issue of the second marriage, lies at the point of death. I will not insult your noble nature by bidding you refrain from embittering his death-bed by the revelation, bootless as cruel, of a father's guilt, nor do I ask you to mourn his early doom ; but let him meet that doom without this pang.

“If your friend be all you describe, and the delicacy of his conduct under the late painful disclosures betrays a character of no ordinary worth, he will not, deep as are his wrongs, compel a father to stand in the presence of his sinless child with the flush of shame upon his brow—that child, too, already on the threshold of the grave.

“Happily—for she thus escapes a twofold agony—the second Mrs. Selwyn is no more ; she died of atrophy. Her son inherits her delicacy of constitution, and, with his demise, and he is past all human aid, dies out the hopes and the ambitions of the erring father. It will then become his interest, as it cannot be doubted it

will be his best consolation, to recognize the claims of the son of his first marriage.

"Even as I write, the bell may be tolling for the poor boy who has so innocently usurped the heirship of another. Even through this cherished son is the father smitten! None may gainsay that Percy Selwyn has deeply sinned; it is not for us to judge how sorely he may have repented—

" 'What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted.'

"Of this be sure, atonement to the living is at hand.

"Our precious Florence will shed many tears over this tragedy, but bid her mark throughout the unerring hand of Providence.

"God knows there needs no additional weight to crush the little life left, out of this man; alone, utterly alone, with his guilt-clouded conscience. May heaven, for only heaven can, whisper peace and consolation!

"My next will announce that all is over; till then stay all proceedings."

At that moment the young officer entered.

"Well met, Langley;" and Castleton put his friend's letter into his hand.

He was not disappointed in his estimate of

Everard Langley. Before the young man had read a dozen lines his emotion became so uncontrollable that his lordship left him to himself, while he sought out Madame St. Géran, who received the intelligence he had to communicate with a burst of contrite tears. Her wrath was suddenly appeased in hearing of the dread visitation that had overtaken her child's destroyer. He would drink to the very dregs of the poisoned chalice—truly that child was about to be avenged! Selwyn, triumphant and happy in the bosom of his family, she could despise, abhor; but she had only sighs and tears for the father in his deep of woe.

“Ah! my lord, we have all—the holy Virgin help us!—sore need of pardon. My heart has been strangely hardened against this poor sinner, but let him but own his lawful son, and I think, I hope, I may be brought to forgive him. I will pray our Blessed Lady's mediation in his behalf, for verily he has greatly sinned.”

Leaving Madame St. Géran to try the efficacy of “our Lady's” mediation, Castleton went in quest of his ward.

CHAPTER XXV.

They stand between the mountains and the sea,
Awful memorials, but of whom we know not.

ROGERS.—*Italy.*

“AND you would really exchange this fairy scene for our cold northern clime, dearest?” said Castleton to his ward, as they stood by an open window on one of the sunniest of Naples’ sunny days, or rather evenings, for they had been watching the gradual decline of the sun, and the rich and varied hues of the clouds reflected on the glittering surface of the transparent waters.

“Really Stratford,” returned the maiden; “shall I not find another Eden, another and a dearer home, in that delightful country which you have taught me to think the best, if not the brightest? My recollections of it are, I own, imperfect, but are there not a thousand tender associations connected with the very name of England? is it not my native land—my mother’s too—and yours? and, oh! Stratford, did not *he* love it for all our sakes?”

The soft, ungloved hand rested on her lover’s arm as she thus spoke, and, as she raised her eyes, so darkly, brightly, beautifully blue,

the long silken lashes touched the arched and delicate brow, while emotion deepened the hue of her cheek, though it paled the lip. There was something so inexpressibly affecting in the manner of Florence in her graver moments that Castleton might have been forgiven if he had preferred it to the witchery of her more mirthful ones.

Entranced, subdued, he folded her in silence to his bosom. Once more they turned to the splendid panorama before them, bathed as it now was in the lustre of that unrivalled sunlight; for though that sun had sunk beneath the wave, earth, ocean, and sky were steeped in the glowing hues he had left behind, to welcome, it might be, the fair young moon.

There are no sunsets like those of Naples, especially in the autumnal months, and there is no scenery to compare with it; there is soul, voice, poetry in it. Baiai's classic groves, the gay Chiaja, the gardens of the Villa Reale, the lofty amphitheatre of hills crowned by St. Elmo; the shadowy Apennines, looking like guardian monarchs of the land; the broad and bright Campagna; Vesuvius; and, above all, beyond all, the tideless waters of her transparent bay.

"You will have no scene like this in our land of fogs, my darling; you will not, as you have so often done from St. Elmo's height, look down

on blushing vineyards and orangeries, and groves of citron and olive. Small need to dip your pencil in the rainbow tints of a Claude to portray the features of an English landscape ; —all is actual, cold, and real as the dullest utilitarian can desire."

"Stratford ! for shame ! how dare you disparage your native land, and mine, sir ! Why, I have heard you quite eloquent about your hop-grounds ; you even said you preferred them to the vineyards of Burgundy and Champagne."

"And so I do ; nor is an English turnip or potato-field contemptible ; but said I ever that Windermere was more lovely than Como, or the banks of the Thames than yon beautiful bay ?"

"Ah ! Stratford, you cannot disenchant me. Whenever the thought of England recurs, I feel like one journeying from a far-distant land to a home—dimly remembered, it is true, but oh ! how fondly loved !"

"My own, own dear one !"

"And," continued the blushing girl, "you forget how many delightful plans and projects we have formed, the places of interest we are to visit together."

"Together !" murmured Castleton, with a grave face, and a but half-checked sigh.

"Yes ; we are to wander by Avon's haunted

stream ; to see Abbotsford, and Newstead, and Annesley."

"And Oatlands," interposed Castleton, smiling at her enthusiasm ; "you are to sketch the 'auld' house and the parsonage—yes, you must see the parsonage, and Herbert, dear old Herbert," and the cloud passed away ; but here the whole party entered, accompanied by Vivian, whom they had not seen for several days. He and his uncle had been villigiaturig it in some of the most noted spots in the vicinity of Naples.

"Glad to see you, Frank—grown interesting, I suppose, since your travels ?"

"Not the most flattering insinuation that, Castleton ; was I ever anything less than interesting ?"

"At *your own* appraisal, Mr. Vivian ; I should say not," put in Bathurst, with a rather ambiguous smile.

"Quite an Apemanthus, Mr. Bathurst, but I was under the impression his lordship was addressed. However, if any change has taken place, there cannot be two opinions as to its being for the better."

"On the assumption that it could not possibly be for the worse, eh, Vivian ?"

"You're the incarnation of civility, Castleton, but I assure you, you have only anticipated my modesty in saying so."

"Sorry I should have forestalled you on the only occasion of its being brought into notice. But what news from the suburbs, what moving accidents of flood and field did you encounter?"

"Oh, a legion."

"Ca s'entend ; all travellers do, English travellers especially ; but anything really marvellous ?"

"I'm afraid not, the age of miracles is extinct."

"Not quite, Frank, since you have grown modest."

"Why, for the matter of that, Castleton, I don't find modesty so very taking a quality, and to a lonely bachelor on a foreign soil, it is undeniably an encumbrance."

"Nay, Frank, I'll not prolong the argument, if you are really conversant with the article, but it has always struck me that your modesty, like Jack Absolute's, was a thing often talked of but never seen."

"Like Mr. Acre's courage, it comes and it goes," subjoined her ladyship, "oozes out at the tips of your fingers."

"I'm certainly an enviable dog," groaned Vivian, "like Phœbus, when he was kicked down from Olympus, 'no bones broken, but sorely peppered.'"

"Indeed, Mr. Vivian, we are most discourteous, pray let us have your *carte de voyage*."

"My dear madam, we have but scampered over the same ground as yourselves. At Sorrento, where, as in duty bound, we invoked the spirit of Torquato, we lingered a day; a week had been too brief a period had you been there. We sent a longing gaze across the bay at enchanting Naples, and so near did it appear, that we could have fancied it no less practicable than delightful to sail across to you in half an hour."

"And the view from the heights of Sorrento?" queried her ladyship.

"I think it surpasses anything that can be conceived of the grand and beautiful in nature, and I am not an imaginative or a romantic sort of fellow either, I do assure you I am not."

"Has any one brought so grave a charge against you, Frank?"

"No matter, Castleton, Madlle. de Malcé will be lenient to a little enthusiasm."

"She will be lenient to a great deal, Mr. Vivian."

Warming under the influence of the heavenly smile that accompanied these words, Vivian grew eloquent on Italian scenery.

"Just fancy," he went on, "Ischia, Procida, Naples, Vesuvius, the Felice Campania, Capua in her bosom, the broad expanse of the blue and beautiful Mediterranean, and then the Apennines,

'so shadowy, so sublime, as rather to belong to heaven than earth.'

"But, Mr. Vivian, were you not charmed with the wild solitude of Paestum?"

"Indeed, yes; still, Madlle. de Malcé must forgive me if I own to feeling just a trifle disappointed—nay, don't exclaim—not with the shattered columns so every way unequalled alike for their exceeding grandeur, as the interest attached to them from their remote antiquity, for I believe they antedate the eternal pyramids. Tradition is silent respecting them, but any way in the first Cæsar's time they were visited as rare specimens of the antique."

"Then what ruffled your humour, Frank, since these mouldering monuments had the good luck to escape the lash of your criticism?"

"Well, the erection of several modern buildings in immediate juxtaposition with them, which to my mind sensibly mars their general effect."

"Yes, they are strangely out of keeping with the hoary ruin; the desolation were so complete without this impertinence."

"And if a scene so wild and dreary," resumed Vivian, "needed any accessory, it was to be found in the squalid appearance of the few luckless wretches whom we met, some wandering about half-clad, others stretched along the damp

unwholesome grass ; till then, I had not realized the idea of humanity sunk to such utter degradation. I was right glad to get away, I assure you."

"But," bluntly interrupted Bathurst, "you did not surely leave these hapless wretches to perish?"

"To be sure not, I brought them away with me, Mr. Bathurst ; shall I introduce them to you?"

The smile which was general at Charles Bathurst's expense, a little disconcerted him.

"I mean," he said, "that you lent them some aid."

"Excuse me, Mr. Bathurst, it is not my principle to make proclamation of alms-giving ; we are taught, I believe, to 'do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.'"

"I stand rebuked, Mr. Vivian, I had no right to make question of your good feeling ; the words were involuntary, pray go on."

"Nay, my dear fellow, that is all ; my slender stock of romance fled before this hideous reality, at all events, for that day ; the fit may return, for Paestum can never be forgotten—the hour, too, sunset. 'Oh, for the pencil of wild Salvator !' thought I, though the interesting excitement of banditti were still wanting."

"Imagination should have supplied this de-

sideratum," said Castleton ; "but they are almost an extinct race, ten years hence their very existence will have become problematical, talked of as a superstition or vulgar error."

"Not unlikely,—before I crossed the Alps my belief was fixed as the stars, that detachments of these captivating gentry dogged your steps at every turn."

"One of the many prejudices of an Englishman," said the marquis ; "he brings a host over with him."

"And scatters, at least, one half to the four winds before his return," added Vivian.

"He had need."

"Well, Frank, having, like the sun, left your P.P.C. at Paestum, you hastened on to Eboli, I presume, for you had a smart two hours' drive before you ?"

"We had indeed, and not first-rate cattle either."

"Did you visit the Hermitage at Salerno ?"

"Yes, and the monks gave us a very hospitable reception, too—corporeal and spiritual—we laid in such a stock of philosophy as would have startled the Staggyrite."

"Hope you'll profit by the lesson."

"Thanks, Castleton, I have no doubt of it."

"I have, very great."

"Did they tell you that the truest philosophy lay in following the bent of your inclination, Mr. Vivian?" archly asked the fair Florence.

"Spare me, Madlle. de Malcé, I have long since repented my presumption in sackcloth and ashes. Alas no! nothing accommodating, nothing epicurean found a place in their theory, I assure you."

"Then you'll content yourself with the theory, Frank."

"Exactly, and leave the practice to you, Castleton. Well, on our way back to Sorrento, we stopped at Amalfi; but I weary with my egotism."

"Patience is one of the first lessons in philosophy, Frank; go on, what did you do at Amalfi?"

"Nothing: with sharpest appetites, we would fain have dined."

"Your bill of fare was not tempting then?"

"Not tempting; no; we might have invoked the Olympian deities after the fashion of the Dean of St. Patrick.

"Ye Gods! although we be but sinners,
Save us, oh save us from such dinners!"

"Oh! Cambacères was not all wrong, 'un dîner sans façon c'est un perfide,'" said the marquis.

"But did you expect a dish of ortolans to be

served up, with water poured out by a Gany-mede, at a little fishing town such as Amalfi ?”

“ No, no ; I believe, in the utter exhaustion of a famishing spirit, I should have welcomed an importation of quails, had they been fresh, but nothing, on my life, nothing that was eatable. The meats were unsavoury—I shudder at the bare recollection—the wine sour, the water thick, with whole hordes of living occupants : yes, you may laugh, but, perhaps you never felt the sacred rage of hunger. A small flask of wine was all we had with us ; we shared it with generous emulation, but what then ?

“ ‘ Man is a carnivorous production
And cannot live, as woodcocks do, on suction.’ ”

“ You should chronicle that Apician feast at Amalfi as a warning to your friends, Frank, if they journey thither, to provide a pair of fat capons and a flagon of wine.”

“ I’ll adopt your suggestion, for hunger, let me tell you, is a marvellous deadener of one’s perceptions of the ‘ sublime and beautiful’ in nature ; it knocks all the romance out of a fellow.”

“ And endangers his philosophy, Mr. Vivian,” said Florence, with a provoking smile.

“ And endangers his philosophy, lady. In spite of my starved condition, however, I sum-

moned the spirit of Stanfield to my aid, and made a sketch of the place ; but I asked a dunce of a boy, whom, in compliment to his scarlet Phrygian cap, I had introduced into it, if he did not think it was like Amalfi, when the lout declared, in his brutal jargon, as much like Hindostanee as Italian, that 'it was more like a smear.'"

"Or a whale," put in Castleton. "And did you demolish the critic or the sketch, or both?"

"Well, the sketch first; so the Royal Academy has to mourn the loss of a chef-d'œuvre to have been entitled 'Amalfi, Bay of Naples,' for in my wrath I consigned it to the watery deep, and if the little scamp had not taken to his heels I should have sent him after it, by way of practising him in the art of swimming."

"Rely upon it the little scamp was right, Frank. You acquired considerable reputation for your 'smears' at Eton, I remember. There was a Vesuvius of yours worked up in vermillion, and young Welling, Townley's fag, asked you if you meant it for boiled lobster."

"And didn't I horsewhip him soundly for his impudence?"

"You might have done so, perhaps, if the imp had not been your junior."

"Or if you had not stood by to see fair play. The little boys dubbed him their champion,

Madlle. de Malcé ; he had quite a juvenile corps under him, a sort of body-guard voués jusqu'à la mort. They were a trifle afraid of him, too ; but that's your true devotion, love and fear. I promise you I'd as soon have been expelled as encounter his frown."

"Was it so awful?" asked Florence, a little timidly.

"Appalling, I assure you."

"It must have been a dire offence to call down this avenging frown," said the marchioness, rather coldly.

"Why, yes ; to do Castleton justice he was always too high-minded to be captious, but he had such a horror of a sneak."

"Who has not?" burst forth Bathurst.

"Yes, a sneak is trying as an acquaintance ; but it was extraordinary the sway Castleton ('Sans peur' he was called) held over the minds of these young reprobates. When he left for Oxford I believe he marched off with the affections of the whole body corporate ; there was not a dry eye in the college."

"Pray draw rein, Frank ; don't even in jest slander Herbert Malgrove."

Vivian opened wide his eyes. "I slander Herbert Malgrove!"

"Well, well, of course not ; but you are altogether mistaken. Herbert and I left Eton at

the same time ; the tears shed were for his loss, the affection carried away was the lawful property of Malgrove. I doubt if I was much liked ; I am sure I was not popular, but Herbert was adored. As a boy the feeling he inspired was one of intense personal devotion. None ever asked then, none ask now, if he deserved this devotion ; it was, and is, his by universal suffrage. You know what Foxley says, speaking of Herbert, 'I always remain uncovered in that man's presence as to the spirit of good.' For my own part I don't know how far a man might *think* evil in his presence, but I am very sure he would utter none."

It was not without emotion that Castleton had spoken, and Vivian could not jest again, but the truant colour came flitting back to the fair cheek of Florence as she nestled closer to her guardian.

"Was your uncle too tired to venture hither, Vivian?" inquired the marquis, after a pause.

"Not at all, sir ; I left him deep in some Utopian scheme for the advancement of our rebellious race. No, thanks to locomotion, which I take to be a sovereign specific against gout, he is quite well ; he would have been in for a desperate attack if he had remained shut up in his 'castle of indolence.' You have no idea how he was charmed with the travelling on the great

post-road from Naples to Calabria, and grew quite eloquent about the ancient Appian way, for, spite of his utilitarianism, he is only half reconciled to the rail."

"You saw Castel-a-mare, of course?"

"Yes, the old gentleman had made up his mind to dream away an hour at the grave of his favourite Pliny."

"It's all a dream here, I think," said Bathurst.

"No wonder it is the resort of the painter and the poet; besides its natural beauties there is not a stone in the kingdom but is stamped with some classic association."

"Oh, Mr. Bathurst, are you too turning from your so lately sworn allegiance to the 'Queen of the Adriatic'? Is Venice so soon forgotten?"

It was the silvery voice of Florence that asked this question.

"Forgotten! Ah, no, Mdlle. de Malcé; I can never forget Venice, never cease to think of her as the fairest of all fair cities. I may admire Naples more, but I shall never love her as I love Venice;" and Charles Bathurst gave a sigh to the memory of the far happier hours he had spent there before Vivian had come among them.

"Pray spare us a rhapsody," exclaimed Vivian, affectedly. "'Nil admirari' is the motto of the present age. To become dis-

tinguished you must hold your senses in a kind of lethargy."

"Thank you for unsolicited counsel, Mr. Vivian ; if apathy be the criterion of good taste or celebrity, I'll content me with obscurity."

"Sorry to have ruffled your very remarkable equanimity, Mr. Bathurst." It was marvellous how polite these two gentlemen were the one to the other. "But, word of honour, you are lost beyond redemption if you take to rhapsody. And nothing, you know, is easier, especially in our native England, than to get up a sleepy fit ; more than any land under the sun, or the fog, it embraces all the agréments for its indulgence. Consider, too, the wear and tear of the lungs."

"Perhaps so, but to my poor thinking few things are more contemptible than the false taste which is content to substitute the artificial for the natural."

"The notions of a bygone day, Mr. Bathurst. Depend upon it you will find them very much in the way, if not totally unrecognizable, in the polite world."

Some one has said "that he who is not a coxcomb at twenty will be a bore at fifty." There may be some truth in it ; yet no one could be more really unaffected than Frank Vivian, but he had been a little spoiled by the world, for it is next to impossible to live in it and not to

a certain extent be infected with its follies. Vivian adopted them as he did a new fashion ; each lived its little hour, and then died an easy and natural death. And, as we have said, he redeemed half his vagaries by a nature so frank, free, and generous, that he was a universal favourite. Bathurst, perhaps, regarded him with a slight feeling of jealousy ; but Bathurst had since his introduction among them declined a little in the scale of importance, or so he fancied. Then, too, Vivian, giving full rein to his mirth-loving disposition, and quick to detect Bathurst's weak point, bantered and patronized him as though he were a mere boy ; and sometimes the beautiful Florence smiled at these sallies.

Ah ! that was the sting that crimsoned the youth's cheek, and fettered a tongue that else had exhibited as keen a wit as his tormentor's. for he possessed a higher order of intellect ; but he had not Vivian's fine temper, and was certainly his inferior in ease and variety of spirit ; indeed of late he had imprudently enough made no effort to subdue his passion for the fair heiress, hopeless, utterly hopeless though he knew it to be, and at length his health gave way. Even the marquis, not usually quick-sighted, remarked upon his pale cheek and unequal spirits, but the marchioness kept his

secret, even directed suspicion into another channel.

"The climate," she averred, "the climate of Southern Italy induced languor, the so-vaunted 'dolce far niente,' the vis inertia was nowhere at such high pressure as in this luxurious capital. Clearly, Charles had caught the infection, it was next to impossible to escape it."

Her ladyship's tactics were successful, the plea in the foolish boy's behoof was received in all good faith. Alas! for how many ills that flesh is heir to, is not climate made a responsible agent, even as headache is so often put in, an accredited testimony in lieu of heartache!

When will things cease to be called by wrong names; in other words, when will truth prevail over falsehood? When?

END OF VOL. I.



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Samuel Tinsley, 10, Southampton Street, Strand.

liberation, and that we may rely on his determination seconding his enterprise. All prospectuses of new undertakings tend naturally to exaggeration, but success will be well worth the waiting for, should it be only the shadow of that on which Mr. Tinsley reckons. He gives some surprising figures; he states some startling facts; and, as a practical man, he draws some practical conclusions. He quotes a statement of Mr. Charles Reade's, to the effect that three publishers in the United States had disposed of no less than 370,000 copies of Mr. Reade's latest novel. He estimates that the profits on that sale—the book being published at a dollar—must amount to £25,000. Mr. Reade, of course, has a name, and we can conceive that his faults and blemishes may positively recommend themselves to American taste. But Mr. Tinsley remarks that if a publisher could sell 70,000 copies in any case, there would still be £5,000 of clear gain; and even if the new system had a much more moderate success than that, all parties would still profit amazingly. For Mr. Tinsley calculates the profits of a sale of 2,000 copies of a three volume edition at £1,000; and we should fancy the experience of most authors would lead them to believe he overstates it. It will be seen that at all events the new speculation promises brilliantly, and reason and common-sense conspire to tell us that the reward must come to him who has patience to wait. *Palmar qui meruit ferat*, and may he have his share of the profits too. Meanwhile, here we have the first volume of Mr. Tinsley's new series in most legible type, in portable form, and with a sufficiently attractive exterior. The price is four shillings, and, the customary trade deduction being made to circulating libraries, it leaves them without excuse should they deny it to the order of their customers.

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